

# Torsion and Temulence in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas: A Critical Examination of the Staging and Regulation of Ethical Space

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I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and constitutes the findings of my research in the subject; the work contained herein has not been presented in any previous application for a degree,

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## Abstract

This study engages the problem of ethical space in the work of Emmanuel Levinas by situating the 'production' of what Levinas will term the 'face' (*le visage*) against the horizons of its institution. It is against these horizons, it will be maintained, horizons apt for phenomenological reconstitution, that the face is revealed *qua* face. Through a broadening of such Levinasian explicata as 'filiality,' 'fecundity,' 'fraternity,' 'teaching' and 'maternity,' the heritability of the face will be deduced and the face placed within the context of its imperative milieu – the ethical circumstances of its signification. This injunctive environment, the staging or *mise-en-scène* for the face-to-face relation Levinas assays, will, *pace* Levinas, be exhibited upon the ground of its constitution and its provenance scrutinized, in order that the legacy of the face might be complicated, and its putative non-historical status, challenged. It will be argued that Levinas limits, unnecessarily, the ambit of what he permits to signify as a face, and thus that tacitly deposited suppositions regulate the composition and configuration of the face within his work. These *posita* will be worked loose from their *situs* and critically examined with a view to assessing their influence upon the development of Levinas' thought. Through recourse to the phenomenologies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Levinas' presentation of ethical space (the *espacement* of ethics) will be appraised in the light of the phenomenologies it purportedly interrupts. The cogency of Levinas' proto-ethical insight will be evaluated in relation to the cultural and religious illustrations to which he appeals. The tension, or torsion, between Levinas' self-styled 'confessional' and 'philosophical' works will be laid bare, and their underlying confluence mooted. Effort has been made to delineate the overall trajectory of Levinas' thought and to treat the Levinasian project as a whole, such that the chosen problematic might be addressed more adequately.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following works and essays are listed in abbreviated form throughout this study. Detailed information on the editions cited is to be found in the bibliography. Individual essays within collections are listed alphabetically, rather than chronologically, under the heading of the volume in which they appear. I have with few exceptions cited the English translation of Levinas' texts first throughout my thesis. Where appropriate I include an abbreviation for the original French text or essay.

### WORKS BY EMMANUEL LEVINAS

<b>ADV</b>	<i>L'au delà du verset</i>
<b>AE</b>	<i>Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence</i>
<b>AHN</b>	<i>A l'heure des nations</i>
<b>BPW</b>	<i>Basic Philosophical Writings</i>
<b>BV</b>	<i>Beyond the Verse</i>
<b>CPP</b>	<i>Collected Philosophical Papers</i>
<b>DE</b>	<i>De l'évasion</i>
<b>DEE</b>	<i>De l'existence à l'existant</i>
<b>DEHH</b>	<i>Discovering Existence with Husserl</i>
<b>DF</b>	<i>Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism</i>
<b>DL</b>	<i>Difficile liberté: essais sur le judaïsme</i>
<b>DVI</b>	<i>Du Dieu qui vient à l'idée</i>
<b>EDE</b>	<i>En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger</i>
<b>EE</b>	<i>Existence and Existents</i>
<b>EN</b>	<i>Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other</i>
<b>ENT</b>	<i>Entre Nous: Penser à l'autre</i>
<b>GCM</b>	<i>Of God Who Comes to Mind</i>
<b>GDT</b>	<i>God, Death and Time</i>
<b>HS</b>	<i>Hors sujet</i>
<b>IRB</b>	<i>Is It Righteous To Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas</i>
<b>ITN</b>	<i>In the Time of the Nations</i>
<b>NP</b>	<i>Noms propres</i>
<b>NTR</b>	<i>Nine Talmudic Readings</i>
<b>OBBE</b>	<i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i>
<b>OE</b>	<i>On Escape</i>
<b>OS</b>	<i>Outside the Subject</i>
<b>PN</b>	<i>Proper Names</i>
<b>TA</b>	<i>Le temps et l'autre</i>
<b>TEI</b>	<i>Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité</i>
<b>TI</b>	<i>Totality and Infinity</i>
<b>TIHI</b>	<i>The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology</i>
<b>TIPH</b>	<i>La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl</i>
<b>TO</b>	<i>Time and the Other</i>

<b>BPW</b>	<b><i>Basic Philosophical Writings</i></b>
<b>ED</b>	Essence and Disinterestedness
<b>EP</b>	Enigma and Phenomenon
<b>GP</b>	God and Philosophy
<b>OF</b>	Is Ontology Fundamental?
<b>MS</b>	Meaning and Sense
<b>PP</b>	Peace and Proximity
<b>S</b>	Substitution
<b>TDTT</b>	Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony
<b>TH</b>	Transcendence and Height
<b>TAI</b>	Transcendence and Intelligibility
 <b>BV</b>	 <b><i>Beyond The Verse</i></b>
<b>AC</b>	Assimilation And The Culture
<b>CR</b>	Cities of Refuge
<b>DJ</b>	Demanding Judaism
<b>IGRH</b>	'In The Image Of God,' According To Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner
<b>NGTT</b>	The Name Of God According To A Few Talmudic Texts
<b>OJRS</b>	On The Jewish Reading Of Scriptures
<b>ORLFG</b>	On Religious Language And The Fear Of God
<b>RIJT</b>	Revelation In The Jewish Tradition
<b>SB</b>	Spinoza's Background
<b>TP</b>	The Pact
 <b>CPP</b>	 <b><i>Collected Philosophical Papers</i></b>
<b>ET</b>	The Ego and the Totality
<b>FC</b>	Freedom and Command
<b>HA</b>	Humanism and An-archy
<b>LP</b>	Language and Proximity
<b>NI</b>	No Identity
<b>PII</b>	Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity
<b>RS</b>	Reality and Its Shadow
 <b>DEHH</b>	 <b><i>Discovering Existence with Husserl</i></b>
<b>CW</b>	From Consciousness to Wakefulness
<b>FHP</b>	Freiburg, Husserl, and Phenomenology
<b>IM</b>	Intentionality and Metaphysics
<b>IS</b>	Intentionality and Sensation
<b>OI</b>	On Ideas
<b>PA</b>	Philosophy and Awakening
<b>PHH</b>	The Permanent and the Human in Husserl
<b>RPT</b>	Reflections on Phenomenological "Technique"
<b>RR</b>	The Ruin of Representation
<b>WED</b>	The Work of Edmund Husserl

<i>DF</i>	<i>Difficult Freedom</i>
<i>BTW</i>	'Between Two Worlds'
<i>BW</i>	Being a Westerner
<i>EP</i>	Education and Prayer
<i>ER</i>	Exclusive Rights
<i>ES</i>	Ethics and Spirit
<i>HAJ</i>	Hegel and the Jews
<i>HGU</i>	Heidegger, Gagarin and Us
<i>IU</i>	Israel and Universalism
<i>JF</i>	Judaism and the Feminine
<i>LTMG</i>	Loving the Torah more than God
<i>MH</i>	The Meaning of History
<i>MI</i>	Means of Identification
<i>ML</i>	Monotheism and Language
<i>MT</i>	Messianic Texts
<i>NDNR</i>	The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights
<i>PU</i>	Place and Utopia
<i>RFA</i>	A Religion for Adults
<i>RT</i>	Religion and Tolerance
<i>SC</i>	The Spinoza Case
<i>SI</i>	Signature
<i>SIRI</i>	The State of Israel and the Religion of Israel
<i>SWAB</i>	Simone Weil against the Bible
<i>VOI</i>	A Voice on Israel
<i>EN</i>	<i>Entre-Nous: Thinking of the Other</i>
<i>DR</i>	Diachrony and Representation
<i>LB</i>	Lévy-Bruhl and Contemporary Philosophy
<i>MG</i>	A Man-God
<i>OUJ</i>	The Other, Utopia, Justice
<i>PGTI</i>	Preface to the German edition of <i>Totality and Infinity</i>
<i>PIC</i>	The Philosophical Determination of Culture
<i>PJL</i>	Philosophy, Justice, Love
<i>GCM</i>	<i>Of God Who Comes to Mind</i>
<i>BCI</i>	Bad Conscience and the
<i>CDNM</i>	From the Carefree Deficiency to the New Meaning
<i>HB</i>	Hermeneutics and Beyond
<i>II</i>	Ideology and Idealism
<i>NM</i>	Notes on Meaning
<i>ODTB</i>	On Death in the Thought of Ernst Bloch
<i>QA</i>	Questions and Answers
<i>TBQO</i>	The Thinking of Being and the Question of the Other



<b>GDT</b>	<b><i>God, Death, And Time</i></b>
<b>BAM</b>	Being and Meaning
<b>BH</b>	Don Quixote: Bewitchment and Hunger
<b>BTDOT</b>	Being-Toward-Death as the Origin of Time
<b>CIOI</b>	Outside of Experience: The Cartesian Idea of the Infinite
<b>ETS</b>	Ethical Subjectivity
<b>ERDO</b>	The Ethical Relationship as a Departure from Ontology
<b>FCP</b>	From Consciousness to Prophetism
<b>GIW</b>	Glory of the Infinite and Witnessing
<b>KT</b>	Kant and the Transcendental Ideal
<b>QS</b>	The Question of Subjectivity
<b>RQ</b>	The Radical Question: Kant Against Heidegger
<b>SAA</b>	Subjectivity as An-Archy
<b>SAS</b>	Signification as Saying
<b>SOR</b>	The Extra-ordinary Subjectivity of Responsibility
<b>TIS</b>	Transcendence, Idolatry, and Secularization
<b>TPA</b>	A God "Transcendent to the Point of Absence"
<b>WE</b>	Witnessing and Ethics
<b>ITN</b>	<b><i>In the Time of the Nations</i></b>
<b>BG</b>	The Bible and the Greeks
<b>BM</b>	Beyond Memory
<b>CTI</b>	Contempt for the Torah as Idolatry
<b>ETE</b>	From Ethics to Exegesis
<b>FPB</b>	For a Place in the Bible
<b>JK</b>	Judaism and Kenosis
<b>NPI</b>	The Nations and the Presence of Israel
<b>TS</b>	The Translation of Scripture
<b>IRB</b>	<b><i>Is It Righteous To Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas</i></b>
<b>AI</b>	The Awakening of the I
<b>BFO</b>	Being-for-the-Other
<b>DTAI</b>	Discussion Following "Transcendence and Intelligibility"
<b>IEO</b>	Intention, Event, and the Other
<b>IFP</b>	Interview with François Poirié
<b>IMA</b>	Interview with Myriam Anissimov
<b>ISM</b>	Interview with Salomon Malka
<b>JP</b>	On Jewish Philosophy
<b>NOO</b>	In the Name of the Other
<b>PAD</b>	The Philosopher and Death
<b>PJL</b>	Philosophy, Justice, and Love
<b>POO</b>	The Proximity of the Other
<b>RS</b>	Responsibility and Substitution
<b>RW</b>	Reality has Weight
<b>UI</b>	On the Usefulness of Insomnia

<b>VO</b>	The Vocation of the Other
<b>WSNP</b>	Who Shall Not Prophesy?
<b>NTR</b>	<i>Nine Talmudic Readings</i>
<b>AGCW</b>	And God Created Woman
<b>AOTW</b>	"As Old as the World?"
<b>DD</b>	Desacralization and Disenchantment
<b>DDF</b>	Damages Due to Fire
<b>JR</b>	Judaism and Revolution
<b>PLPL</b>	Promised Land or Permitted Land
<b>TOT</b>	The Temptation of Temptation
<b>TTO</b>	Toward The Other
<b>OS</b>	<i>Outside The Subject</i>
<b>AB</b>	Apropos of Buber: Some Notes
<b>BMP</b>	Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Philosophy
<b>ELRE</b>	Everyday Language and Rhetoric Without Eloquence
<b>JW</b>	Jean Wahl: Neither Having nor Being
<b>MBCJ</b>	Martin Buber's Thought and Contemporary Judaism
<b>SAW</b>	The Strings and the Wood: On the Jewish Reading of the Bible
<b>TW</b>	The Transcendence of Words: Michel Leiris's <i>Biffures</i>
<b>PN</b>	<i>Proper Names</i>
<b>BTK</b>	Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge
<b>PC</b>	Paul Celan: From Being to the Other
<b>JL</b>	Jean Lacroix: Philosophy and Religion
<b>PV</b>	The Poet's Vision
<b>WO</b>	Jacques Derrida: Wholly Otherwise
	<b>Levinas : Miscellaneous Essays</b>
<b>RPH</b>	Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism (1934/ 1990)
<b>TRA</b>	Trace of the Other
<b>USFG</b>	The Understanding of Spirituality in French and German Culture
<b>SE</b>	Sensibility
<b>DR</b>	Diachrony and Representation

## WORKS BY EDMUND HUSSERL

<b>CM</b>	<i>Cartesian Meditations</i>
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<b>Crisis</b>	<i>The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology</i>
<b>Id</b>	<i>Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy: Book One</i>
<b>Id II</b>	<i>Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy: Book Two</i>
<b>Id III</b>	<i>Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy: Book Three</i>
<b>IP</b>	<i>The Idea of Phenomenology</i>
<b>LU II</b>	<i>Logical Investigations: Band II</i>

## **WORKS BY MARTIN HEIDEGGER**

<b>BT</b>	<i>Being and Time</i>
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## **WORKS BY IMMANUEL KANT**

<b>CPR</b>	<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<b>CPRR</b>	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>

**Torsion**, *n* twisting; a twist; the strain produced by twisting; the force with which a thread or wire tends to return when twisted; the checking of a haemorrhage by twisting the cut end of the artery. [**L** *torsiō*, *-ōnis*, from *torquēre*, *tortum* to twist]

**Temulence**, *n* intoxication. [**L** *tēmulentus* drunk]

The student, being both other and, generally speaking, younger, must come with questions, in the name of the future, and boldly, despite the respect due to the master.

**EMMANUEL LEVINAS**, *In the Time of the Nations*

## INTRODUCTION

Philosophy commences in wonder (θαυμάζειν). That the matter should be so arouses wonder in those for whom the question of beginnings, the question of origins (ἀρχαί), is of some purport. Wonder excites questioning of this kind, and thus excites the interest of philosophers, since the philosopher is one who, according to a venerable tradition, is compelled to question, and impelled to do so by θαυμάζειν. Even the 'lover of myth' (ὁ φιλόμυθος) Aristotle confers, may accede to the status of philosopher (φιλόσοφος), accede to the *Stätte* or τόπος of wisdom, because myth occasions aporia (ἀπορία), and perplexity inspires the pursuit of knowledge, such knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) being precisely the τέλος of philosophy.

The wonder (*étonnement*) in which philosophy begins is commended by Levinas in among other places *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, a work of startling originality and complexity that is certainly apt to induce a state of ἀπορία in those who read it. That Levinas' thought should occasion the very astonishment it would seek to explicate is not incidental, of course. For Levinas' work begins and ends in wonder: the wonder of all wonders (*la merveille des merveilles*) being the face-to-face relation, he will advert. Yet, the *étonnement* of which Levinas writes is traumatic, a veritable 'traumatism of astonishment' (*traumatisme de l'étonnement*) (TI 73; Tel 71) that afflicts the subject in whom this πάθος is aroused. Indeed, wonder describes 'the astonishing or traumatising – *trauma not thauma* – possibility of a *sobering up* in which the ego, *facing the Other*, is freed from itself, and awakens from dogmatic slumber' (PA 177). To be sure, the astonishment Levinas details is an-archic, and attests to a certain revisioning of sense (*sens*) in the wake of philosophy's beginning. The sense to which Levinasian first-philosophy (*la philosophie première*) is recalled is that 'absolute orientation' to the other person (MS 52), an orientation in which the work of ethics is accomplished. What Levinas will term the 'face' (*le visage*), is the 'starting point of philosophy [*le commencement même de la philosophie*]' (PII 59; II 178). That beginning *in place*, as it were, before philosophy *takes place* and takes leave of its own beginning, an ἀρχή that subtends the principium in which philosophy – the science of origins – would seek to ground its enterprise.

The space of ethics, or, what I shall call proto-ethics, opens *in* and *as* wonder; an *espacement* or spacing to which philosophy, as reflection and critique, is summoned, and before which it is placed in question. *Pace* Husserl, for whom it is the wonder (*das Wunder*) of the pure Ego (*reines Ich*), and the marvel of consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), that command the attention of the philosopher, Levinas will assign wonder to the fissuring of egoic consciousness, that is, to the opening up (*dé-claustration*) and coring out (*dénucléation*) of the self. Despite its an-archic pretensions, however, this thought that would aspire to contest the primacy of consciousness, and to wrest the ego from its site of autarky, suffers the impediment of self-evidence, where it might have endured the aporetic and remained true to the indeterminacy that is its mandate. To clarify, and here the topoi of this study will be brought into focus. The subject (*subiectum*) Levinas assays is created through exposure to others. Extirpated from its *conatus essendi*, subjectivity is structured as the other-in-the-same. The subject is susceptible rather than receptive. Susceptibility to and for the face – creaturalité (*la créaturalité*) – is not, apropos of Levinas, something one chooses to undergo, but one’s pre-originary condition of vulnerability. Prior to the assumption of principia, through which one might mitigate the trauma of hetero-affection (*hétéro-affection*), prior, therefore, to the certainty of judgement under which one might subsume the encounter with the Other, the oneself is radically exposed. Yet, the radicality of this exposure is, I maintain, extenuated by principles to which Levinas adheres throughout his work, principia that substruct the putatively an-archic space (both ‘locus and non-lieu’ (*OBBE* 45)) of proto-ethical relations, and regulate what may or may not signify as a face.

That Levinas should be guided in his research by precursory suppositions is hardly surprising. As Nietzsche, a thinker never far from Levinas’ purview, intimates: ‘There is no such thing as a science without assumptions; the very notion of such a science is unthinkable, absurd. A philosophy, a “faith” is always needed to give science a direction, a meaning, a limit, a *raison d’être*’ (Nietzsche, 1956, 288). And, did Husserl too not concede that phenomenology ‘prescribes rules *a priori* for its actualities’ (*CM* §12 [66])? This much is incontestable, I think. However, the ethical circumstances of the face-to-face relation are delimited by Levinas in decidedly nuanced ways, and such delimitation warrants careful analysis and critique.

In my reading of Levinas I have sought to situate the ‘production’ of the face against the horizons of its institution, in order to demonstrate how and why the jurisdiction of signification is limited unduly by Levinas. The configuration of the face within Levinas’ work (its composition and assembly) is governed by presuppositions that restrict the ambit of its provocation and delineate the trajectory of its appeal. By returning the face to its injunctive environment, that is, through a reconstitution of the horizons against which the face ‘reveals’ itself *qua* face, I have endeavoured to complicate the presentation of the face within Levinas’ thought, and to broaden its applicability beyond the terms of Levinas’ discourse. It will be argued that the *espacement* of ethics is constrained by Hebraic and, more pointedly, Mitnagdic imperatives, that condition the upsurge of the face and manage ‘the plot of proximity [*l'intrigue de la proximité*]' (OBBE 190n. 34; AE 82n. 1). A certain *licentia rabbinica* is to be discerned behind the deductions Levinas implements, and the cogency of the latter’s attempt to render *in concreto* the predicament of the ‘interhuman’ is undermined, for reasons I will enumerate.

The field of ethics is besmirched with unsolicited and tacitly deposited suppositions, and such posita, I will aver, must be worked loose from their situs and critically appraised if the staging (*mise-en-scène*) of the face-to-face relation is to be laid bare and exhibited upon the ground of its constitution. That what Dominique Janicaud has termed, a ‘metaphysico-theological montage’ (Janicaud, 2000, 27), should undergird the thought of Levinas would be of little import, were Levinas not to claim, and moreover, to do so repeatedly, that his work is a ‘phenomenology *prior* to a theology that would use what it has borrowed as its premises’ (ETE 109). I will contend, however that in its enunciation of themes and by way of the logic to which it subscribes, Levinas’ thought, in addition to being iterative, is indeed illative, and illative in precisely the manner abjured by Levinas above.

Through recourse to both Levinas’ self-styled ‘philosophical’ and ‘Talmudic’ writings (the underlying thematic consonance of which is, I believe, indisputable) I will undertake to locate the face within the context of its imperative milieu, so as to elucidate what one might, with Husserl call, its ‘generative nexus’ (CM §61 [169]) of signification. By way of a heightening and amplification of such Levinasian explicata as ‘filiality,’ ‘fraternity,’ ‘fecundity,’ and ‘maternity,’ the heritability of the face will be mooted and the thesis proposed that the sense (*sens*) of ethics is an endowment won through acquisition and sanctioned as normative (and thus to some



extent invariant) through the reiteration and repetition of its 'performance.' The schema of the face, as that which one acknowledges within a given axiological range as morally probative, is installed (let us say, *cleared for signification*) through education, inculcation and socialisation, or through what, for the purposes of this study, I will nominate under the heading of 'lore,' deliberately apposing the latter to the 'teaching' (*enseignement*), whether non-maieutic or otherwise, Levinas treats in works such as *Totality and Infinity*.

To propose a reading of Levinas along these lines is, no doubt, a 'fine risk to be run' (*OBBE* 167). Yet, in seeking the 'condition of empirical situations' and, further, pursuing the 'meaning invisible in that condition' (*TI* 173), does Levinas not, in fact, invite this reading and solicit such midrash? To reduce the face, in its exteriority, to the implicit horizons of its latency and birth, to aspire to retrieve its *lieu de naissance* and probe the structuration of its genesis (the matrix of its gestation), is to disentangle the intentional *fila* in which the legacy of the face, the legacy of its 'production' qua face, would be dissimulated.

That the face transcends the limits of its structuration attests, I believe, to the degree of invariance it attains through frequentation and dramatization, rather than to the 'non historical simplicity' (*MS* 58) with which it is accredited by Levinas. This is not to maintain that *something like the face* does not *beleaguer one ethically*, nor that one is not *charged with orientating oneself* in being. That one is 'summoned' is, I suggest, beyond question: from the directive given by elemental nature to seek out sustenance and shelter, to the ordinance of the teat that the newborn suckle and be nourished. The 'form' signification assumes, and the 'sense' it is awarded, however, refer one back to the multiplicity of constitutive acts, the plurality of co-constitutive endeavour, through which these indices of value and determinacy are first set forth. It is to this space of production that I will attend throughout my study of Levinas, for it is here, I will argue, that the sense of transcendence, which prevails in the work of Levinas, is encoded, and its determination fixed.

I do not propose here a genealogy of ethics, therefore. I do not lay claim to a genealogy of Levinas' ethical thought, such as that which John Llewelyn has advanced. Nor do I promulgate a genealogy of morals (Nietzsche). Instead, I offer what might be regarded as a generative account of the conditions under which the face, adduced by Levinas, *signifies as a face* within his work, the conditions under which, to employ Levinas' terms, the 'primary frankness of revelation' (*TI* 98) may

occur. It has thus proved requisite to disengage (*dégager*) the face from the form in which it is instantiated within Levinasian thought (and to challenge the disjunction of face and form in Levinas' thinking) in order to elucidate the themata under scrutiny.

Commentators on Levinas' work have tended, more often than not, to dimidiate the latter's oeuvre and restrict their attention to either his 'philosophical' or 'Talmudic' writings. While I do not believe that such an exegetical policy is entirely unjustified, the problem I address necessitates engagement with both registers of Levinas' thought. I understand that caution is advised when attempting to relate these orders of enquiry (Levinas, after all, intended his publications for different audiences), but do not feel that timidity is called for in academic research, particularly when the exigencies of one's topic demand otherwise. I thereby treat Levinas' oeuvre as a whole, not with the intention of rehearsing the development of his thought chronologically, but so as to exhibit the internal spacing (*espacement*) of my theme within the work of Levinas and establish the principles (ἀρχαί) that regulate its description. In pursuit of these ends, my disquisition of Levinas will adhere to the following itinerary, and is divided into three parts.

In part one, which is largely expository, I situate Levinas in relation to his principal textual interlocutors, Husserl and Heidegger, in order to assess their influence upon Levinas' presentation of ethical space (chapter one). The dimensions of this space will be charted, and the conditions of its production evaluated, with a view to accenting the terms under which it is delimited by Levinas (chapter two). In part one my aim is twofold, then. Firstly to bring into focus Levinas' method and to evaluate its phenomenological credentials; and secondly, to clarify, through my engagement with Husserl and Heidegger, the ways in which Levinas endeavours to move *beyond* phenomenology and to subvert the legitimacy and scope of the 'reductions' it implements.

These preparatory considerations will be deepened and refined in part two, where the topos of the subject (*le sujet*), in its susceptibility, will be examined and its pedagogical predicament, brought to light. Holding sway (*walten*) ethically, it will be maintained, takes place within a predetermined orientation: susceptibility to and for the face is primed. One must *come to acquire* the schema (σχῆμα) of the face and accept it as normative and binding (chapter three). That the subject is '*called upon* to concern itself also with itself' despite the 'unlimited responsibility' (*responsabilité illimitée*) with which it is assigned (*OBBE* 128; *AE* 204), that the trauma of

exposedness might be managed, and the compass of ethical obligation limited, underscores a tension within the work of Levinas, I will argue, that obtains between the ‘emphasis’ of ethics and the ‘esteem’ in and to which one is summoned to hold oneself. This tension will be exhibited and its implications gauged. How, it will be asked, ‘if one is not to abandon oneself to violence’ (*OBBE* 193n.33), can the mandate that one be for-the-other to the point of ‘haemorrhage’ (*OBBE* 72) be fulfilled? The ‘liturgical’ basis of Levinasian first philosophy (the catena of study, rite and lore) will be elucidated and its possibility accounted for (chapter four). In part two I thus attempt to challenge Levinas’ claims that susceptibility (*la susceptibilité*) is a ‘traumatism’ (*le traumatisme*) that surprises one ‘absolutely,’ a traumatism that precludes the assumption granted by receptivity (*TDTT* 105). I suggest that the ethical ‘moment’ need not be described in these terms and that the privilege Levinas accords to ‘passivity’ (*la passivité*) in his account of ethics is misplaced, if not unduly simplistic.

In part three, the sense (*sens*) of the face defended by Levinas will be affirmed in the dimension of its historicity and its provenance questioned. The ‘norms’ of morality which, according to Levinas, permit one to ‘judge Cultures’ (*MS* 59), will be interrogated and their ‘straightforwardness’ confounded. The suggestion that such norms might be ‘prescribed by a *non-archaic* monotheism’ (*BV* xvii) has led me to complicate the accord between proto-ethical insight and its religious and cultural illustration in the work of Levinas (chapter five). Levinas’ many *opera* and *opuscula*, I will argue, form a collection of *midrashim* on the theme of ‘holiness’ (*la sainteté*). Levinas’ works, I contend, seek to ‘disengage’ this holiness (*OBBE* 59) – to pursue ‘the meaning of the beyond’ (*BPW* 190n.22) – and this prompts him to ‘engage’ in a process of what he will term, ‘demythification’ (*TS* 53). The Western philosophical tradition and the positive religion of Judaism have, Levinas suggests, colluded in their desire to expurgate the last vestiges of myth from the margins of history. In so doing, however, as I will seek to prove, both have disclaimed, as mere marginalia, the thought of peoples for whom the ratio of Athens and Jerusalem is not authoritative. I conclude, then, by challenging the presumptions operative behind such claims and arguing for what I have called a pagan attestation, the freeing of a space of contestation *within the work of Levinas* from which the voices of those extruded by the terms of his ethical metaphysics might be heard (chapter six).

Liberating and preserving this space is, I assert, the work of Levinas' work (*oeuvre*), the performance toward which his *opera* tend, their exergual destiny.

## **Part I**

### **The Staging of Ethical Space:**

**The production of the face**

## 1. PRESENTATION

Levinas' analysis of sensibility is problematic. Two instantiations of sensibility are advanced, prescinded by a distinction that is integral to Levinas' project as a whole. This distinction, which is internal to the logic and progression of Levinas' thought, cannot be evidenced phenomenologically, at least not without recourse to the acceptance of certain unregulated positings. Levinas deduces two mutually antagonistic forms of sensibility. Sensibility to and for the 'element' (*l'élément*) in which the ego bathes and from which the 'playthings' (*jouets*) it enjoys emerge, and sensibility to and for the 'face' (*le visage*) of the other person, which summons the ego to responsibility. A factious relationship pertains between the mode of affection the ego enjoys through its involution in the elemental and the affection it suffers through exposure to the Other (*Autrui*). Affection by the face assumes a qualitative precedence over the sensations discharged upon contact with the surfaces of objects and things. While both modalities of affection are characterised by the impression of an *Empfindung*, the encounter with the face impresses itself upon the ego with the force of an imperative. This imperative reveals an *Empfindung* that is quite literally sensational, sensational, that is, in an ethical, or rather, proto-ethical sense, for it does not accommodate the enjoyment which accompanies the savouring of one's immediate sensuous environs (although the 'yoke' of this law can excite a moderate, and moderated, form of ethical *jouissance* (DJ 7)). The face of the Other is the site of a distortion and derangement of the laws which govern the perception of material things. A veritable heterotopia, the face contravenes the ordinances of phenomenological procedure and challenges the dominance of the ego-advertence Husserl situates at the heart of phenomenological science.

To contest the import of Levinas' proposal here, and to support the assertion to which I have laid claim in my introduction, that Levinas' project is conditioned throughout by tacitly deposited suppositions, it is paramount that a careful examination of the face be conducted. In order to sanction the distinction Levinas imposes above, one would need to provide a more detailed phenomenological account of the production of the face *qua* face. Levinas offers no such account. However, an account of the face that would seek to draw signification back into the dimension of its heritability, in accord with the thesis ventured here, would appear to pose a serious threat to the tenor of one of Levinas' most basic claims regarding the face. If, as Levinas maintains, the face disrupts the horizons of intentional consciousness and

thwarts constitutive freedom; if, that is, the face signifies ‘without a context’ (TI 23) (it is the *déraciné* par excellence), then surely a phenomenological disquisition of Levinas’ thought which seeks to analyse the significance of co-constitution, and the inheritance and dissemination of ‘sense’ (*sens*) between generations, compromises the integrity of Levinas’ position? The cogency of Levinas’ presentation of the face is therefore subject to critique, critique being understood here as both the demarcation and transgression of limits. Can the face signify καθ’ αὐτό and yet itself be the accomplishment (*accomplissement*), or achievement (*Leistung*), of co-historization, one wonders? Surely one must learn to recognize the face as a face that commands, in contradistinction to the surface of the thing, which does not? It is to the presentation of this face that we now turn with the purpose of refining and sharpening the line of enquiry broached here. In what follows, which is of a largely preparatory nature, the exposition of Levinas’ thought will be interwoven with critique, with a view to disengaging the themes exhibited from the situation of their assembly within Levinas’ work. The attempt will thus be made to fix key Levinasian explicata in their determination, in order to provide the groundwork for their subsequent elaboration and interrogation in parts two and three of this study.

### § 1. *The locus of meaning*

In the essay ‘Freedom and Command’ (1953), Levinas details his account of the face as a “phenomenology” of the noumenon’ (FC 21). Similarly, in *Totality and Infinity* he describes the structuration of a ‘metaphysical relation’ that ‘connects’ one with a ‘noumenon which is not a numen’ (TI 77). The face is enigmatic, Levinas avers, resisting the designation phenomenon (φαινόμενον), which, for Husserl, gestures to the appearance of that which appears and highlights an essential ambiguity between an object’s modes of presentation, and the acts of consciousness (whether active or passive) for which it appears. Despite defining intentionality (i.e., ego-advertence or thought’s being about its object) as itself highly enigmatic, Husserl retains confidence in the prowess of phenomenological procedure and the enigma (*Rätsel*) he describes rapidly yields to scientific scrutiny (although he continues to recognize the philosophical life as essentially enigmatical (*Crisis*, Appendix IX, 394)). Phenomena surrender themselves to the intentional gaze. The phenomenon (φαινόμενον) may well be the appearance of that which appears in and through its own ‘appearing’ (the phenomenon is thus credited with a modicum of independence), but the ‘apparition’ in question, that which appears to and for the ego, is to be understood, ultimately, as



the achievement, or work, of constitution. The 'absolute givenness' of the phenomenon is secured by consciousness. Consciousness, apropos of Husserl, is the staging or *mise-en-scène* for the 'givenness' (*gegebenheit*) that is disclosed there.<sup>1</sup>

An object is thus given, Husserl will contend, to the extent that it is 'meant' (*gemeint*). It is *prima facie* inconceivable that an object be given to consciousness and yet not be meant by it. The activity of *Sinngebung* (the bestowal of meaning) is thus basal to the work of consciousness. It is arguably its very *conditio sine qua non*. Husserl's axiomatic 'Principle of Principles' (*Id* §24) – clearly an indication of Husserl's archontic predilections – states that 'every originary presentive intuition is a legitimising source of cognition,' and, furthermore, that 'everything originally offered to us in "intuition" is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being' (*Id* §24). However, the phenomenon (φαινόμενον) which is presented here, presented, that is, in accordance with the strictures of the 'principle' to which Husserl subscribes, is always already the product of noetic activity. Husserl may well concede that this *principium*, or ἀρχή, is itself the residuum of a certain process of limitation. That which appears is given as such 'only within the limits in which it is presented there' (*Id* §24), we will recall. Nevertheless, these limits delimit the range of phenomena (φαινόμενα) appertinent to a 'science' of 'cognitive phenomena' (*IP* 11). These limits delimit the very possibility of the possible, the possible being that which is possessable by consciousness.

The phenomenological reduction, therefore, entails 'a limitation to the sphere of those things that are *purely self given*' in the '*strictest sense*' (*IP* 48-49; emphasis mine). This restriction, moreover, attests to a constriction and a construction of sense. Certain phenomena, namely those that cannot be 'restricted to the sphere of pure evidence' (*IP* 48), fall outside the compass of phenomenological investigation (an admission to which Levinas is clearly alert), while phenomena are themselves precisely those things that are to and for consciousness as the achievement of constitutional activity.<sup>2</sup> Intuition (*Anschauung*), or 'immediate "seeing"' (*Id* §19), likewise has a 'legitimizing function' because it is the 'originally presentive source' of 'meaning' (and hence all rational assertions). Yet, the remit of possible meaning is

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<sup>1</sup> As Levinas comments in the essay *Question and Answers* (1977), phenomenology aims to bring the *things in themselves* 'to the horizon of their appearing,' namely 'that of their phenomenality.' Phenomenology thus endeavours to 'make appear the *appearing itself* behind the quiddity that appears' (*QA* 87).



circumscribed prior to the performance of the reduction(s). The very ‘evidence’ of the evidential is, as it were, ordained prior to the phenomenological epochē (ἐποχή) and the process of suspension initiated by it. Thus, the phenomenon ‘falls under a principle’ to which the phenomenologist ‘must subject’ him or herself ‘in the critique of cognition:’ the ‘principle of the ἐποχή’ (IP 34). This limitation demonstrates that Husserl’s ‘principle’ is a regulative one. Phenomenological science is, after all, oriented toward a ‘horizon of undetermined determinability’ (CM §13 [69]), and the ‘determinability’ (*determinierbarkeit*) stipulated here in turn guarantees the value of the principium it prescribes.<sup>3</sup>

The locus of meaning, for Husserl, is thus consciousness itself. And, more pointedly, the place at which this meaning is ‘unqualifiedly given’ and in which the ‘pure’ phenomenon of the intentional relation is accomplished as given, is the place of a decisive activity, namely cogitation (IP 36). Phenomenology, as a pure eidetic science, may well purport to be a discipline operating ‘entirely’ within ‘*the limits of mere immediate Intuition*’ (Id §65), however, the vectors of the region it surveys are pre-delineated in accordance with the dictum of rigour to which Husserl submits himself. Husserl limits the universality of the ἐποχή in order to ‘discover a new *scientific domain*.’ The parenthetical method he executes is thus a ‘definitely *restricted* one’ (Id §32), restricted, that is, by the scientificity of the principle he expostulates, and the ideal of rigorous science (*strenge Wissenschaft*) he pursues.<sup>4</sup> An ideal ultimately rooted in a conception of the philosopher as one who is, above all else, ‘self-responsible;’ responsible, Husserl would argue, for bringing to fruition ‘the possibility of universal knowledge,’ a goal, or rather task, to which philosophy (φιλοσοφία) is uniquely called (Crisis §7).

Levinas contests the Husserlian location of meaning throughout his works. Indeed, the topos (τόπος) where ‘meaning’ is accomplished (the site from which sense (*sens*) signifies) occupies centre stage in Levinas’ disputations with both Husserl and Heidegger. Although Husserl acknowledges the ‘self-givenness’ of what is simply ‘seen’ (IP 33), this very seeing, Levinas will suggest, englobes phenomena within consciousness. The phenomenal appearance of the phenomenon, given to the perceptual gaze, may not contain its object – things admit of transcendency, after all –

<sup>3</sup> As Bernet notes, phenomenology, as an investigation into the λόγος that ‘allows phenomena to be given, *fixes in advance* the *conditions* the Other has to meet in order to mean anything to me.’ As such, ‘phenomenological openness is a *determinate* openness’ (Bernet, 2000, 44; emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> Even such a staunch apologist for the phenomenological ‘method’ as Dominique Janicaud observes that there is a ‘pretension’ in the ‘resolve to make *all* philosophy pass through the Caudine Forks of a scientifically rigorous project’ (Janicaud, 2000, 87).

the ontic status of the thing and all judgments relating to its spatio-temporal factual being are subject to parenthetical exclusion (*Id* §32). However, the concatenation of appearances, in their various syntheses and categorial forms (which Husserl identifies as the ‘shifting and remarkable’ structure of appearances), do ‘create objects in a certain way for the ego’ (*IP* 56). Construction (*Konstruktion*) is thus rudimentary to givenness. Givenness is embedded in the constructive operations of consciousness.

In consonance with the ‘self-givenness’ of phenomena, evidence ‘sets up’ or ‘institutes’ and ‘abiding possession’ for the ego (*CM* §27 [95]). As noted, the possible is that which is possessed and retained by consciousness – the ideal object pole toward which noetic activity is directed.<sup>5</sup> It is this institution that Levinas opposes in his account of the face (a term which features throughout his various *opera* yet which is engaged with particular acuity in *Totality and Infinity*). Consciousness, for Levinas, is not the ‘source’ (*Quelle*), or ‘origin’ (ἄρχή, *Ursprung*), of meaning. If this were the case, the Other would be set up, and set up, what is more, in a manner that is truly bathetic, for a fall from significant ‘height’ (*hauteur*). A fall that would see it, together with the Platonic ‘sun’ or ἄγαθόν, usurped from its position of prominence as that which orients sense within the work of Levinas; a fall not so much into ‘inauthenticity’ (*Uneigentlichkeit*), as a recession into a ‘nocturnal’ space (the *il y a*) antecedent to (*Existents and Existence*), yet somehow contemporaneous with (*Otherwise than Being*), the very advent of meaning.

The ‘sovereign ego’ (*RR* 121), Levinas will argue, is dislodged from its occupancy as the source of meaning by the other person. It is through the face that such a displacement (*déplacement*) is effectuated. The ‘I’ loses face in the face of the Other, one might say. As Bernet cautions, however, such talk of displacement is ultimately misleading, and at best, ‘provisional,’ for it suggests that the subject occupies a ‘stable’ position prior to the encounter with the other person (Bernet, 2000, 53). Levinas, of course, is keen to dispel misunderstanding of this nature, and to demonstrate the absolute (structural) apriority of the Other in relation to the self. As we will discover, the contradictory logic of the ‘anterior posteriorly [*antérieure postérieurement*]’ (*TI* 170; *TeI* 184) enables Levinas to argue against the grain of standard chronometry, and to bring to light the situation of diachrony that underpins the face-to-face (*face-à-face*) relation he describes.

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<sup>5</sup> As Levinas observes in ‘Intentionality and Sensation,’ the ‘intentional object has an *ideal existence* in relation to the temporal and spatial *position* of consciousness’ (*IS* 137; emphasis mine).

Husserl's 'object' of cognition, presented originally *leiblich da*, remains decidedly spectral for Levinas. The spectre of consciousness and its lucubration literally looms about it. Indeed, in the final analysis is intentionality, for Levinas, anything other than a kind of ghastly or *geistly* looming about; that is, a controlled, disengaged, theoretical appraisal of things? As Levinas remarks in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, intentionality ultimately delineates the 'centripetal movement of a consciousness that coincides with itself' (*OBBE* 48). Throughout his endeavours to further concretise the science of putative concreteness (i.e., phenomenology), Levinas strives to render concrete the encounter with the other person and to recast it ethically. He thus aspires, as it were, to *traduit l'homme concret* (*TI* 139; *TeI* 147). This demands a radical revision of Husserl's 'Principle of Principles' and a contestation of the primacy of consciousness as Husserl depicts it. The 'exteriority' (*extériorité*) in which the face of the other person opens differs markedly from the exteriority of represented objects, an exteriority Levinas deems to be correlative with the 'very exteriority of what is thought with respect to the thought that intends it' (*WED* 59).

Through his 'face,' Levinas informs us, the Other displaces the ego from its *stabilitas loci* and sets it within 'his' own hetero-tropic orbit (this *stabilitas loci* has, as noted above, always already been destabilized). The Other places the ego's centre of 'gravitation' outside itself (*TI* 183). Levinas' thought, one could argue, effects a Ptolemaic reversal of the Copernican revolution orchestrated by Kant. Levinas deploys the term *kath' auto* to contrast the 'expression' of the face with the presentation (and presentification) of objects grasped within the phenomenological attitude. The face expresses itself *καθ' αὐτό* because its 'manifestation' is not contingent upon the antecedent structuration of consciousness. The Other presents 'himself' *ex proprio motu*. The remarkable structures through which, according to Husserl, 'objects' are created for and by consciousness are destructured in the face-to-face encounter.

Experience, for Husserl, is characterized, throughout its various stratifications, by the accomplishment of synthetic unity. The conceptual order is thus always already inscribed within the sensible order; sense data (ὕλη) are organized by predetermined intentional schemata. Intuition, as Husserl elucidates it, is the apprehension of both the data of immediate sensory experience and the prearticulated synthetic form(s) into which this manifold is ordered. Intuition is simultaneously the confirmation (*Bestätigung*) and the cancellation (*Durchstreichung*) of intentional regard because the intentional is already predelineated, as such, according to the conceptual schemata

that synopsise the sensible. As Levinas notes, 'the intuitive act is at once intention thinking a presence and the indispensable presence of a content in the subject' (*IS* 140). For Husserl, therefore, sense (*Sinn*) is always constructed in accordance with the mandate of a preordained intentional proto-sense. Phenomenological science is preceded by prescience, sense subtended by pre-sense.

However, the Other, apropos of Levinas, is given (and this phrase is employed advisedly) qua face as an excession of sense and the interruption of order. Intuition is struck down by an excess or surplus of signification, a surplus that is 'inassimilable' (*TH* 19) by consciousness (an excess itself reflected in the 'surplus of duties' (*NGTT* 123) that befalls the ethically reconfigured subject of responsibility). Of course, it may be the case that Levinas' distinctly ethical intuition (*Anschauung*) similarly attests to the cancellation and confirmation of pre-articulated intentional horizons (which we might also term inherited horizons, adapting a phrase Husserl enlists to describe the 'instinct intentionality' (*Instinktintentionalität*) of the infant, a theme to which we will return in part two), horizons that delimit what may and what may not signify as a face.

Where Husserl posits the self-identity of 'things' as a prerequisite to phenomenological explication – one can only 'conform to the things themselves' and 'consult them in their self-givenness' (*Id* §19) if a principle of identity regulates their appearance – the ethical field Levinas excavates posits the identity of the face with itself in distinction to the face's other, namely its form, with which the face is disunited. The face is congruent with itself. It is, Levinas proclaims, 'in touch with itself,' such that it 'expresses its very expression' (*PII* 55). The formal structure which guides the analyses of *Totality and Infinity* (*TI* 79) is itself structured according to this basic polarization, a polarization no less apparent in *Otherwise than Being*, I suggest. The bifurcation of 'face' and 'form' opens the field of Levinasian ethics (itself opened within the interstitial space of separation (*séparation*) that disparts the existent from the Other, *ab origine*). This severance, one might argue, functions within Levinas' philosophy much in the way that the 'bipolarity of the lived and the thematised' does in that of Husserl (*OBBE* 167).

One is enjoined by Levinas to heed the face, qua face, and yet this very injunction is not, it seems, 'given' to an 'originarily donative intuition' (*Id* §24), but predetermined (and hence limited) by the edicts of, dare one say, a grounding principle. Levinas will speak of the 'rigorous determination' of transcendence described by 'ethical attitudes and exigencies' (*HB* 106), yet one may enquire as to

what confirms the status of this rigour. Why, for example, is the face the other of its form? Despite being congruent with its self, is the face not two faced? Does a certain perfidy not attend its visitation, since it faces in two directions, being both heliotropic (it gestures toward the ἐπέκειντα τῆς οὐσίας) and geotropic (it remains terrestrial)?<sup>6</sup> How does the supra-sensible form, through which the face signifies, differ from the material format that occludes it? Is it not somewhat ironic that despite struggling in the agon of concretion Levinas fails to root the Other down? Does Levinas not, in fact, fail to demonstrate how the face is informed by its context?

Arguably, Levinas exhibits the symptoms of acute ontico-phenomenological rhizophobia; that is, he is suffering from a severe fear of the *radix* or root (a condition typically undiagnosed in the secondary literature on Levinas, with the exception perhaps of Visker (Visker, 1999, 392-5)) Is the Other not, to employ the argot of adolescence, quite literally off his face, and thus bereft of countenance, so marked is the diremption of the phenomenological and the ethical in the description of the face Levinas outlines? Being off one's face would thus appear not to be solely the vocation of the crapulent or those prone to bibulous excess. Perhaps, the discipline of 'ethical metaphysics' is itself susceptible to bouts of temulence, that is, to lapses of 'sobriety,' in which the heady spirit of allegiance – and ligation – to the face (the governing law of Levinas' *scientia regulatrix*) interrupts the vigilance of ethical regard, and where 'things' that might *regard me* (or *m'accusent*), are regarded by Levinas as simply donanda: 'things' to be used and dispensed with at will.

In the encounter with the face, consciousness cannot access its 'object' – its intentional routings are impeded – and a relationship of 'adequation' no longer obtains between noeses (mental acts) and noemata (mental objects); relationality, as Levinas construes it, must no longer be conceived exclusively in these terms. The 'rigorous parallelism' (OI 23) between noema (νόημα) and noesis (νόσις) is interrupted. Access accedes to excess. This decisive suspension of access is part of the sense of the face, comparable to the way in which the access to the phenomenon (φαινόμενον) is 'part of the meaning' of the phenomenon (MS 44). It may be that the 'human being is accessible – as a face' (OF 8), yet such 'expression,' Levinas opines, 'is not less, but more direct than intuition' (FC 21). A 'face is not known,' and this is not because it is devoid of meaning, *sens*, or *Sinn*, rather 'it is not known because its relationship with us does not refer to its constitution and, to use Husserl's term, is

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<sup>6</sup> In an interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas will claim that the interhuman is an 'interface,' or 'double axis,' where 'what is 'of the world,' qua phenomenological intelligibility, is juxtaposed with what 'is not of the world,' qua ethical responsibility' (Cohen, 1986, 20).



prior to all *Sinngebung*.' This sense, he continues, is a 'plenitude of meaning prior to any *Sinngebung* (FC 22), in fact, 'signification precedes *Sinngebung*' and 'marks its limit' (TI 207). The signification of the face thus delimits the very delimitation of sense upon which the regulative principle of Husserlian phenomenology is founded. Where *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* cautions against the idioticon of 'intentionality' and '*Sinngebung*,' associating both with the autarky of the ego, and subsequently reversing them under the headings of creation (*création*) and passivity (*passivité*), *Totality and Infinity*, in concert with those essays immediately preceding and proceeding it, condones such terms, thereby retaining these bastions of the phenomenological lexicon, albeit subverting their application considerably.<sup>7</sup>

Husserl is guilty of a kind of second order naïveté, Levinas argues, for the phenomenological reduction, intended, after all, to counter the methodological naïveté of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), exhibits a perturbing laxity of its own. The reduction withholds itself, that is, holds itself in abeyance (or obedience to its regulative ideal) to the extent that it is held in place (and put into play) by a principle, which, as we have discovered, circumscribes its range in advance. Levinas extends the scope of the reductions implemented by phenomenology and thus permits, what to Husserl's thinking at least, would be the sheer devastation of intuition. The conventionally non-phenomenal is henceforth included within the parameters of the 'more radical phenomenological analysis' practiced by Levinas (ET 43). An 'ethical *Sinngebung* becomes possible,' therefore, a '*Sinngebung* essentially respectful of the Other' because it does not presuppose the work of a 'sovereign ego' (RR 121) but gestures to the disruption of the horizons of cognition by alterity. The extent, of course, to which the 'radicality' of this alternative programme is hindered by the conservatism of Levinas' own principle(s) of regulation, remains to be seen.

The reduction Levinas performs uncovers a distinctly ethical structure, or rather *dé-structure* (GCM 199), that is not the 'product' of consciousness and its 'destiny' but that within and from which consciousness is itself brought to light. This *dé-structure* inverts the logical sequence of accomplishment adduced by Husserl and attests to an order of constitution in which the constituted becomes ('within

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the 'essential of ethics,' Levinas will maintain throughout *Totality and Infinity*, is 'in its transcendent intention' and this ruptures the formal structures of thought (TI 29). However, despite the fact that the ethical subject cannot be reduced to the field where beings are displayed in their phosphorescence – consciousness does not establish the limit for all that appears – do formal, conceptual 'structures' not remain in place to manage the distinctly 'ethical' *Empfindungen* that strike the subject? Does the subject not impose its own limit (or have a limit imposed upon it) upon what may or may not obligate it qua face?

constitution') the 'condition' for the constitutive activity that accomplishes it (*TI* 128).<sup>8</sup> 'Representation' thus '*already finds itself placed* within horizons that it somehow had not willed, but with which it cannot dispense' (*RR* 121; emphasis mine). Such a dispensation confirms, for Levinas, that the ego does not so much 'let the Other be,' but instead speaks to the Other in response to 'his' summons. The 'ethical reduction' must not be conflated with Heideggerian *Gelassenheit*, or *begegnen lassen*, for this would be, according to Levinas (and however misguided this reading of Heidegger might be), to situate the will, and consequently volitional activity, at the heart of ethics. As Levinas will indicate in *Otherwise than Being*, the way I appear is itself a 'summons' (*OBBE* 139). In more traditional phenomenological terms, one might say that I am given to 'myself,' qua ethical subject, against the horizon of my being summoned by the Other. Indeed, language itself 'comes to me from the Other' and is not 'enacted within consciousness' but rather 'reverberates there' putting me into question (*TI* 204). Language, in opposition to vision, is the 'medium' through which the relationship with the Other 'takes form' and the 'horizon' against which it is presented (*TI* 195).

Levinas is resolute, therefore. The other person is not a 'thing' available to comprehension, nor an object apt to be besieged by consciousness. The Other does not 'sparkle' for consciousness (*MS* 36). Alterity is not defined by its emication. Contra Heidegger, first philosophy (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) is by no means phain aesthetics; the face does not 'show itself forth' or φαίνεσθαι (although Levinas' thinking of the 'face' may well be, as I hope to demonstrate, phain aesth-ethical). The Other does not, to adopt the nomenclature of *Totality and Infinity*, 'manifest' him or herself against a predelineated or 'illuminated horizon' (*MS* 36). Again, this would be tantamount to rendering the Other secondary to consciousness and its constitutive structures. Levinas believes that the 'comprehension' of the Other is 'inseparable from his invocation' (*OF* 6). The two are interlaced such that the Other is given to thought, albeit as that which disrupts and exceeds it, as that which both orders and ordains thought, as that which invokes and provokes thought, and that towards which the ego is called. However, the intertwining evidenced here, between what one could call the twin poles of 'interpretation' and 'interpellation' (and defended above in the essay 'Is Ontology Fundamental' (1951)) does not retain its priority in later work where the face increasingly resists all comprehension and refuses the residency of

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<sup>8</sup> As Levinas intimates in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, the 'I,' qua creature, is 'already constituted when the act of constitution first originates' (*OBBE* 105).

form, passing obliquely into an immemorial past beyond recuperation and immune to synopsis.

Levinas' prejudice against the 'optical' and its position of primacy within phenomenological inquiry rises to prominence in the account of the face he assays. His disavowal of the metaphors of 'light' and 'vision' is notably pronounced in this regard. Light and the vacuity of 'space' cannot be the conditions for the relationship with the Other, Levinas asserts, because 'vision is not a transcendence' (TI 191). Vision does not breach the horizons within which consciousness confers meaning upon the world; vision 'opens nothing beyond the same' because it 'empties space' and compels things to release themselves to the ego's intentional regard. Such compulsion traduces the transcendence that must be preserved if the call of the Other is to be heeded in its exigency. Speech, therefore, 'cuts across vision' (TI 193), Levinas urges, because the Other is first and foremost an 'interlocutor' and not an object through which one's gaze may pass. The Other's very passing by effects a desistance of intentionality in which the 'pure Ego' (*reines Ich*) is literally stood down from its pole position.

## § 2. *The ordinances of phenomenological procedure*

In attempting to provide an analysis of the ways in which the Other presents 'himself' to the subject (the effectuation of the Other, as it were) Levinas, as we have seen, broadly adheres to the edicts of phenomenological explication. Indeed, as early as the 1929 essay, 'On Ideas,' Levinas had identified the 'way in which an object is given to consciousness and the meaning of its objectivity' as the leading directives of phenomenological enquiry (OI 10). However, for Levinas, phenomenological *access* is consistently (dis)qualified by phenomenological *excess*, and while the face of the Other appears to me, it presents itself in a manner that is refractory to 'vision,' thus falling outside the jurisdiction of theory (θεωρία).

The Other appears to me in the modes of invocation and summons; *manières d'être* which obtruncate all attempts to grasp the Other as phenomenon. It is through language (ultimately emphasized by Levinas as exposedness and vulnerability, that is, as the 'approach to and contact with the neighbor' (LP 125)), conceived as 'hearing,' 'heeding,' and 'listening,' in response to 'commanding,' 'teaching' and 'petitioning,' that the Other person is apprehended as one who faces me. Such apprehension does not appraise, or contemplate, the Other but is precisely the 'way' in which the face is 'welcomed' (TI 189). Moreover, transcendence is 'not an optics' but is rather the 'first



ethical gesture' (TI 174), since the face is not merely seen and subjected to the computations of constitution. Its arrival 'deforms' vision (TI 291), effecting a 'mutation' of the intentional aim that would proffer to thematize it. Somewhat paradoxically though, 'of itself ethics is an "optics"' (TI 29), Levinas affirms, for it effects a seeing that is at once a seeing to the needs of others, a vision that is at once a kind of service, as if the hand that probes the element of the world were, rather, an eye. The hand (arguably the excellence of corporeity for Levinas, for it is that which gives (OBBE 67)) obeys the summons of the face as the eye heeds the imperative of light, one might conclude.

A notable ambiguity plagues Levinas' account of the face. An ambiguity that is perhaps deliberate, as the 'confusion' of theory and practice is said to be in *Totality and Infinity* (TI 29), but which troubles the coherence of Levinas' thought. It is an ambiguity marked by disparity, for the face occasions a curious disjuncture between what we might call the ontico-phenomenological and the ethical regions of inquiry. (I am not, however, disclaiming Levinas' thought as simply a kind of regional ontology qua the region (*Gegend*) of ethics.) Levinas analyses the face in both registers, and his descriptions are often inconclusive, or worse, nebulous as a result. The demarcation between the ontico-phenomenological and the ethical domains is poorly upheld by Levinas and the two registers regularly bleed into one another (to the point of haemorrhage perhaps, as the well known Levinasian trope would indicate; haemorrhage in need of torsion, perhaps, as the title of my study intimates). This is far from problematic. Indeed, this very descriptive reticence serves to strengthen the case for an account of ethicality based on the heritability of 'sense' (*sens*). However, for the project undertaken by Levinas the indeterminacy adduced here is grave. Levinas is obliged to enforce (and it certainly is an enforcement) a distinction between the ontico-phenomenological and the ethical dimensions in order to guarantee the validity of his arguments concerning the face. Yet this polarization aggravates the cogency of his position precisely because it is repeatedly frustrated in the accounts of the face Levinas imparts.

Of course, the indeterminacy suggested here informs critical debate regarding the phenomenological credentials of Levinas' thought. Levinas himself concedes that 'phenomenology defects into a face' (OBBE 90). This defection is a cause for celebration, moreover, and not for concern, as critics like Dominique Janicaud would maintain. Such defection jeopardizes the concreteness of the face, however, and attenuates its appeal and appealingness, because the material conditions of the Other's manifestation are robbed of their descriptive force. The Other is thus, it

seems, bereft of sensible qualities (or 'qualities' susceptible to theoretical appraisal) and intentionality *suffers a bereavement* before the face. The perceptual regard is thereby bereaved of its relata. Levinas recognizes this critical impasse but remains, nevertheless, committed to explicating the predicament of thought, and highlighting the deposition it suffers, before the other person. The Other, he will claim, 'bears alterity as a quality' (EE 94; emphasis added). As intimated, the Other is 'recognized' (EP 70) in the manner of an invocation. An invocation given through the modes of appearance of 'misery' and 'poverty' (MBCJ 18); modes of appearance which one might also term Levinasian *Seinsweise*, providing one understands the Being, of such 'ways of being,' to be a being otherwise than the Being of Dasein in its circumspective concern, and the being of the *conatus* in its nissus toward self-preservation. This is how the Other 'appears' to me, or rather, the one who faces me is *produced in this way* (TI 291).

Before questioning more closely the fragmentation of face and form upon which Levinas' thought is founded, and arguably founders, it is important that the 'non-phenomenality' of the face be clarified. Until a grasp of that which spurns all grasp is attained, accentuating the discordance between a face that reveals one suffering the paucity of their condition, and a condition that is itself extirpated from the field of phenomenological explication (is the Other poor precisely because she is deprived of 'form'? Is materiality not the very format of the face?), would be decidedly premature.

'Vision,' Levinas will insist (and vision here serves as a metonym for a certain phenomenology, a phenomenology governed by representational and recuperative acts) is 'consummated' in the ethical vis-à-vis (TI 23). Vision, and the synopsis it entails, is inured in the face of the other person. The face is an enigma, or noumenon, before which phenomenal form recoils and from which the rays of the intentional regard do not return to synthesise their referent (TI 23). Continuing this pyral motif, Levinas suggests that in the face 'cognition and the manifestation of being' are 'engulfed in an ethical relationship' (LP 120). As our analysis proceeds, we will need to consider carefully what mechanisms, if any, prevent the individual from being 'consumed' in the relationship Levinas describes here. Levinasian first philosophy (*philosophie première*) appears close, at times, to terminating in a kind of ethical sutteeism. Quite what protects the subject from the 'consummation' of being that murmurs in the depths of the *il y a* (EE 57), and the 'expiration' in which the adventure of ethical life ultimately culminates (can one even say this, for 'my' responsibility exceeds the limit of 'my' death?), is debatable. As Bloechl and Ricoeur

have both argued, 'morality' might involve 'managing' the 'conflict' that arises between 'economic desire' and 'religious desire' (Bloechl, 2000, 282), that is, between 'self-attestation' and the 'injunction coming from the other' (Ricoeur, 1992, 355), rather than simply suppressing one of these dyadic poles, in Levinas' case the needs and interests of the self, in favour of the other.

While during the period of *Totality and Infinity* Levinas will seek to describe the (non)relation with the face as an 'intentionality of a wholly different type' than that commandeered by Husserl – a mode of intentionality accomplished in an *ethical Sinngebung*, a nonintentional intentionality, as it were – he is adamant in his conviction that the presentation of the face not be conflated with the perception of physical 'things.' The typological distinction Levinas enforces between thetic modes of intentionality and ethical intentionality informs his prejudice against the application of the face to the nonhuman creature. This typological distinction spares the face from the degeneracy of its form, Levinas maintains. The face repels its form. Like the element, it is monstrous, exorbitant, and this 'mutation' is brought to light through the 'opening of a new dimension' (TI 197), a dimension hitherto foreign to phenomenological science, the dimension of the proto-ethical. Material things, however:

Manifest themselves as answering to a question relative to which they have a meaning – the meaning *quid* ? [...] This content cannot be detached from the context . . . it answers to the question by its place in the system. To ask *what* is to ask *as what*: it is not to take the manifestation for itself (TI 177).

The quiddity of the thing is predicated upon its comparability. One grasps the quiddity of the thing (its quality or qua-lity) by experiencing it as such and such a thing, Levinas insists. A pre-established referential system is always in place, therefore, prior to the perception of a material thing. It is into this system that the perceived object is installed. To unravel an object is to 'situate the object in a perspective of thoughts' and thus to 'determine its ontological place' (WEH 55). The signitive 'as' upon which the systematism in question is founded is the basic axiom of perceptual experience.

In Levinas' thought (at least up to and including the period of *Totality and Infinity*) the metaphors of the 'said' are troped by the superlation of the face, a *surimpression* which exceeds the capacity of thought and disrupts the synchrony of comparability. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, the standing of metaphor within philosophical thought is challenged further by the resolutely anti-systematic hetero-affection of the 'saying.' The *surimpression* of the face in its exorbitance is

rethought, in conjunction with insights gleaned from Husserl's lectures on internal time consciousness, as the *Ur-impression* of the other-in-me. The figure of maternity (*maternité*), the bearing of the Other, is gestatorial, both in the sense that I bear the inscription of the Other's passing like a naevus, or birth mark (a permanent reminder that my origin qua 'creature' (*créature*) is irretrievable, unlike the 'source-point' described by Husserl (*PIT* §36)), and because 'I' carry the Other to term in an endless gesture of ethical portage, such that the *terminus ad quem* of responsibility is at once its *terminus a quo*. Indeed, the 'saying' bears the 'said' as the an-archic origin of signification.

But what, it may be asked, is one to make of the copulative 'is,' and the signitive 'as,' in operation here? What kind of relation obtains between them? Indeed, can this relation be an accord of kind, that is of γένος, given the absolute singularity of the face, which purportedly interrupts essence and breaks with the λόγος of commensurability? Perhaps Levinas' suggestion, that metaphor is itself troped by the 'one-for-the-other' (*GP* 147) – arguably the trope of tropes – is relevant here. For, through 'my' substitution for another, the 'I' of egoity (*idem*) and the 'me' (*ipse*) of diacony are chiasmatically intertwined and enfolded one within the other. 'I' am the work of substitution: I am in so far as I am 'for' the Other. My being, qua creature, is taken up as a subjection to the neighbour. As Levinas notes in 'Questions and Answers' (1977), the Hebrew word *kamokhah* communicates something of the audacity of this extraordinary proposal. *Kamokhah*, a term deployed in the Biblical edict to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18), comes to encapsulate those words that precede and proceed the phrase 'your neighbour' in this Levitical formulation. Thus, one is, as Levinas explains, to love one's neighbour, for 'all that is yourself; this work is yourself; this love is yourself.' (*QA* 91). The passage between the copulative and the signitive is accomplished as substitution, therefore. Ontologico-grammatical order is itself posterior to the declension I undergo through exposure to the face. Substitution is not a metaphor (*OBBE* 57). The ethical sense (*sens éthique*) engendered by the face is not deferred or transferred to it, by analogy, from another source. The face does not resemble any 'thing:' all comparables derive from its incomparability.

By contrast, or so Levinas will declare, the 'thing' is assimilated to the 'correlation between thought and being' which 'thinking itself founds' (*GCM* xii). It is present *leiblich da* before consciousness because it can be synthesized and ordered by cognition. Things, apropos of Levinas are, we recall, 'movables' (*muebles*) suited to the domiciliary space of consciousness; the desiderata in which acts of enjoyment

terminate and the 'world-space' across which the relation with the other person is enacted. The clarity of evidence, with which the 'thing' (and by thing it is clear that Levinas includes the nonhuman creature) furnishes consciousness, commissions the disappearance of that which could shock or awaken the ego from its complacency. The thing is a thing among other things: one among many. It is a member of a genus (γένος). It does not signify ethically. However, the face shatters all systematicity and interrupts the predelineated horizontal structures of experience. The face, contra the thing, cannot be lodged within any system or programme of thought. It cannot be accommodated as such. The face's essential 'homelessness' reflects at once both the material poverty of the other person in his or her state of need, and the lack of shelter accorded the face by its form.

The question that pursues the quiddity of the 'thing' – the question that would seek to disclose it and corroborate what it is – is 'put to someone,' Levinas adverts, and thus presupposes the encounter with the face. The face, of course, in not 'a modality of quiddity' and is 'prior to every question' (TI 177). Above all, the face signifies prior to the posing of the *Seinsfrage*, for it is not the 'question of Being' so much as whether it is righteous to be that impels Levinas' thought. The 'Da of Dasein is already an ethical problem,' Levinas quips (AB 48). The tenancy of my ontological place is not an assured one. The *Grundfrage*, ethically reordered and realigned according to the vertical axis of the face, contests its very own constation. The 'ontological form of the said,' Levinas argues 'devolves from the very contestation of this signification' (OBBE 156). The posing of the question effects a deposition of the constituting ego, displacing it from the pleasure of its aplication. Similarly, and as it were by default, the identity of the oneself (the singularity of the responsible subject) is not, Levinas avers, 'the inertia of a quiddity,' nor is it due to 'some distinctive quality,' such as the colour of the hair or eyes that would make of such a subject a 'unicum' (OBBE 194n.9), but is instead the product of a veritable ethical metanoia (μετάνοια).

Levinas will argue that the face is the presentation of 'an entity as an entity,' a 'personal presentation' (FC 20). Here, then, the conjunctive 'as' singularises rather than compares, for the face of the Other is incomparable. The face composes its own γένος, hence the Other does not 'belong to the same genus as the ego,' Levinas will maintain (HA 138). The indicative 'as' is emphatic, therefore, emphasizing the uniqueness of the face without dissimulating it or translating it, qua 'thing,' into the currency of the mundane and familiar. Yet the translation of form into face arguably disfigures (*devisagé*) the face and jeopardizes its injunctive force because that which



expresses itself καθ' αὐτό within Levinas' thought is managed by a regulatory framework: a παράδειγμα that arguably governs the work of ethics and sets its limits. A framework, moreover, which presents the face according to its own internal mandates.

Might it not be possible to transfigure the 'thing'? Might limpid things not retain an enigmatic quality and bear their transcendence as their 'identity'? Might the sheer quoddity of the thing, the fact that it is (rather than what it is), be sufficiently binding to warrant our being obliged to honour and respect it? If phenomenology engenders a commitment 'to the things themselves,' an appeal to the *Sachen Selbst*, then might part of what is entailed by phenomenological practice not involve a willingness to *return things to themselves* and to let them be for their own sakes (and not simply ours), since, after all, both *Sache* and *sake* share a common etymological heritage and it is a question of the heritability of sense that is at stake here? The other person may well be exempt from the laws of constitution, as it were. But the 'outside' (*dehors*) from whence this other issues is already 'inside,' that is, it is an 'outside' ordered by, and arranged in keeping with, the principia (ἀρχαί) that extend the field of ethical space as Levinas ordains it. The 'outside' is relative to the conceptual schema (σχῆμα) that schematises it, and the schema in question is dominated by the polarization of face and façade. One may naturally enquire, therefore, as to what regulates the polarization evidenced here, and, furthermore, what enforces the schismata that separate its poles, poles in many ways as basic to Levinas' project as the separation (*séparation*) that preserves the integrity of the dyads about which this philosophy is oriented.

In signifying καθ' αὐτό the face stands out from the world, unsettling the horizons into which thought would place it. Similarly, through a kind of inverse ecstasis, I stand out as one who is uniquely 'elected' to serve the Other whose face confronts me. Unlike the thing, harboured by its form, the face presents the alterity of the other person and signifies beyond the similitude of mental states in which the Other (the alter-ego) is secured for cognition through an intentional modification of my own states of mind (*CM* §52 [144]). The 'Other' is not, *pace* Husserl, the index of an analogical transfer. As Derrida notes, the Other 'is not signalled by his face, he is his face' (Derrida, 1978, 100). The face is the τόπος, or site, of a chiasmic exchange in which vision is decussated by speech, a decussation which, Levinas urges, attests to the 'crux' of a 'plot' not reducible to phenomenology (*OBBE* 46). It is through language, in turn, that one 'quits the order of violence' (*ES* 7) – the jurisdiction of 'light' – because language is the locus for the 'teaching of exteriority' (*TI* 196). I am

the recipient of the offering which language is. (As Levinas will argue in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, I receive my very capacity to receive from the Other. All remnants of volition are excised from the encounter, therefore. Receptivity is henceforth conceived as radical passivity (*passivité*). I am created – a creature.) To what extent this discourse on the Other is itself received, and to what degree the designation of philosophy as the ‘wisdom of love at the service of love’ (*OBBE* 162) is a product of received wisdom, handed down through the lineage of a particular historical-cultural community, is moot.

For Levinas, language is a discursive medium, and discourse discides the planiform space of equipmentality set forth by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, by reordering relational space according to the strictures of interlocution. The laterality of objects positioned alongside one another is intersected by verticality as space inclines towards the face. The face-to-face delineates ‘a distance in depth’ and it is here that conversation is ‘enacted’ (*TI* 39). Indeed, the ‘banal fact of conversation’ is, Levinas declares, the ‘marvel of marvels’ (*ES* 7); a marvel that exceeds the wonder (*das Wunder*) occasioned by the ‘marvellous correlation between the *phenomenon of cognition* and the *object of cognition*’ which, according to Husserl, ‘reveals itself everywhere,’ and excites sufficient wonder to inaugurate the discipline of phenomenological science proper (*IP* 10). The face, as Levinas defines it, is, in *stricto sensu*, ‘nowhere’ for it issues precisely from ‘elsewhere’ (*ailleurs*) (*MS* 60), and is not contained within a series of limits which position it relative to an environing boundary. Although, it is arguably delimited by a set of criteria that regulate its ‘entry’ into the mundane order and ensure that the ‘sense’ (*sens*) of the face is properly managed. Managed, perhaps, much in the way that the hierophant manages the altar or effigy through which the ‘god’ manifests itself, a form of priestcraft which, in this instance, matches the brawn of rabbinical science with the scrupulousness of Husserlian phenomenology.

The face, in its heteronomy, is thus taken to refute the universality of the ‘marvellous correlation’ Husserl believes to belie all intentional acts. It could be maintained, though, and in opposition to Levinas, that the face qua *noumenon* is itself correlative with the face qua *phenomenon*, i.e., the concept of the ‘face’ apprehended as the counterpart to the ‘façade’ of things within a predetermined conceptual configuration. As such, some kind of *Begriff des Ethischen* remains operative throughout Levinas’ presentation of the face, despite his protestations to the contrary. It is the ‘marvel’ of the face Levinas has in mind when he proclaims ethics to be ‘spiritual optics,’ however (*TI* 78). ‘Religion’ and ‘metaphysics’ are ‘only possible’

as ethical relationship; they are reconfigured, literally reordered, according to the mandate of the face (FC 21). 'Religion' is given sense – it comes to mind (*vient à l'idée*) – within the context of the ethical vis-à-vis. Ethics is the passage, or *πόρος*, to the spiritual. The 'starry heavens above' (*der bestirnte Himmel über mir*), which, along with the 'Moral law within' (*das moralische Gesetz in mir*), provoke the admiration of Kant in the closing pages of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (CPRR 269), do not fill Levinas with awe. Such ouranic wonder, the 'wonder' Kant fixes with the term *Bewunderung* and directed toward οὐρανός, is decidedly misplaced, Levinas beseeches, for the appropriate locus of astonishment (*étonnement*) is the face of the other person. 'Heaven' and 'earth' align as such in the face of the Other, and there alone. Thus, neither the 'light dove,' which, according to Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cleaves the air in free flight, nor the air, whose resistance this 'bird' suffers during flight (CPR A5/B8), arouse the wonder Levinas situates at the heart of his ethical philosophy. Neither the nonhuman, nor the elemental, occasion the wonder sanctioned by the face, for they are, apropos of Levinas, precisely faceless (TI 140), mere props strewn about the 'stage' of ethical life to enhance its 'performance,' the donanda of supererogatory transaction. Hardly a mark of nobility, then.

### § 3. *The enigma of the face*

Husserl demonstrates convincingly that the unification of 'objects' within perceptual experience (encountered within the natural attitude) is accomplished when the subject is 'directed straightforwardly toward an object and what belongs to it' in such a way that the perceptual regard traverses the manifold appearances of the 'object,' in its various adumbrations, and grasps it, albeit naively, as a unity (*Crisis* §28 [105]). The 'straightforwardness' attested to here by Husserl is suspended in the 'reflective attitude' in which phenomenological science commences. To be sure, in 'perceiving straightforwardly' objects are 'grasped,' but the immediate seeing upon which the 'evidence' prized by phenomenology is based, remains occult. The reflective attitude, by contrast, opens the sphere within which phenomenological inquiry is directed toward 'perceiving itself' and the 'perceptual directedness' that apprises its object(s) (CM §15 [72]). The phenomenologist thereby adverts to lived experience as it is lived or inhabited. The phenomenologist takes up residence in the 'stream of mental processes' (*Id* §34) and directs his or her 'mental regard' (*geistigen Blickes*) toward the shifting panoply of appearances given there. For Husserl, 'experiential seeing' is



thus of secondary importance to ‘immediate “seeing”,’ the latter being the ‘originally presentive consciousness,’ or source, of all sense (*Id* § 19).

Levinas contests the primordially of this presentive source, underscoring the dubiety of its originality. The ‘intentionality of a wholly different type’ (*TI* 23), which he commends as the ‘condition’ for ‘every objective truth’ (*TI* 25), is revealed post ethical reduction. Again, the significance of Levinas’ declaration that ‘*the difference between objectivity and transcendence*’ serves as a methodological ‘guideline’ for the analyses of *Totality and Infinity*, should not be underestimated (*TI* 49). The reflective attitude lauded by Husserl is itself reduced under the auspices of an ethical recovery of sense. The reflective attitude defers to the ‘*aptitude* for speech’ (*TI* 23; emphasis mine). Representation may be the ‘natural locus of evidence.’ However, it is necessary to ‘proceed from’ an immediate seeing of the phenomenon (φαινόμενον) ‘back to’ the ‘situation that *conditions* it’ (*TI* 24; emphasis added). Hence, the reflective stance is itself proved to be naïve, and the latent naturalism it conceals is now subject to an ethical excavation from which a supra-natural (metaphysical) source of meaning, or *sens éthique*, is deduced (*OBBE* 148; *AE* 231).

The phenomenological excavation (*fouille*) Levinas undertakes, uncovers the inflective dimension of the face beneath the field of pure consciousness opened in the reflective stance. The ‘straightforwardness’ of ‘natural’ perception, abdicated by Husserl in order to enter the ‘reflective attitude,’ is restituted within the supra-natural (or contra-natural) aptitude as the ‘straightforwardness’ (*droiture*) of the face-to-face relation. Here the ‘straightforwardness of an orientation’ is delineated (*MS* 55), an orientation that challenges the ‘sense’ given in the ‘straightforwardness that characterizes the relationship between noesis and noema’ (*MS* 36). This ethical proto-sense, Levinas believes, counters the ‘essential disorientation’ that defines culturally relative configurations of ‘sense’ and ‘signification’ (*MS* 44); an assertion that we will need to interrogate as our analysis proceeds.

The face is frank in a way the thing is not, Levinas argues, because the face is without façade. The ‘frankness’ (*franchise*) of the face-to-face inhibits thematization (*TI* 182). It presents itself as a commanding ‘presence’ (*Totality and Infinity*) before which *je ne puis plus pouvoir*. I am dis-empowered before the face – it is not that I am enfeebled, so much as *mon pouvoir de pouvoir* is defied, one might say (*TI* 198) – yet the thing remains vulnerable to the emprise of the ‘grasp.’<sup>9</sup> There is

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<sup>9</sup> One may dispute the authority of Levinas’ claim here. Are all interpretative frameworks and conceptual paradigms (παράδειγματα) thwarted in the encounter with the face? Surely the ethical space in which the encounter with the Other is produced is opened by the distinction between ‘face’ and

no possible vantage point from which 'I' am able to synopsise the face. The 'sway of the I,' Levinas confers, 'will not cross the distance marked by the alterity of the other' (TI 38). The face is not a congeries of silhouettes (*Abschattungen*) available to perspectival variation. The Other conceals no 'other side.' The Other cannot be 'non-intuitively cointended' in 'phantasy' so as to disclose 'his' hidden profiles and render 'his' invisibility, visible (CM §20). The exteriority of the face is 'inscribed in its very essence' qua face (TI 196). The 'merely sensuous, experiential seeing' (Id §19) which, as we have noted, Husserl has recourse to reduce in order to appraise the pure seeing appertinent to phenomenological explication, is reinstated, or reproduced – *Totality and Infinity*, we recall is a philosophy of 'production' (TI 26) – by Levinas at the heart of his philosophy. This restoration uncovers the ethical substrate of 'experience,' however, and reclaims the sensuous, qua sensibility, as a being seized by alterity, such 'captivation' keeping in play the ongoing trope of astonishment that characterizes Levinas' work.

One's 'experience' of another (ethically revised) is not exhausted in the machinations of retentional consciousness, in which the 'alter-ego' is manufactured from a mélange of fading sense impressions; experience is not first and foremost a matter of recuperation. It is rather 'experience *par excellence*' (TI 196), whereby the 'absolutely other' animates all intellectual endeavour – and as Levinas will confirm in *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* literally animates 'me' (OBBE 180) – from the hither side of egological constitution. Levinas propounds a 'radical empiricism [*l'empirisme radical*]' (TI 196; *TeI* 213) in which experience is straightaway 'straightforward' (*franc*). For, the lingua franca of the face-to-face heralds the 'appearance in the world' of that which 'unmakes and disorders' the established order of things (OJRS 12). By this, Levinas does not simply mean the governing powers, the *pax Romana*, or *pax Americana*, as it were, but the governing principles that structure and instruct 'experience' in both its 'natural' and 'reflective' instantiations. Radical empiricism treats the excellence of experience accomplished in the 'facing position,' an 'excellence' that does not issue from the subject's 'a priori depths' (TI 196) but which exceeds or excels its capacity as genitrix. Radical empiricism seeks to present the very 'emphasis of sense' that reverses and inverts the for-oneself into the

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'form' upon which Levinas bases his ethical 'teaching.' To recognise the face as a face this distinction must be upheld and remain operative at all times (even during the interval of *temps mort* or diachronic time). In order for this distinction to remain fully operative the conceptual montage from whence it issues must first be imposed upon the space of encounter Levinas describes. Does it not appear, therefore, that a conceptual schema regulates the sensible data of the face and its facing 'me,' however traumatic (or proto-logical) such an encounter is purported to be?

for-the-other of signification (*OBBE* 50). The ego's constitutive freedom (its spontaneity) is itself founded and justified in the encounter with the face (*TI* 197).<sup>10</sup>

But, one may ask, is the 'excellence' Levinas deduces here, an excellence particular to the face as such, or is it an excellence that can only ever be prescribed? In Levinas' case such prescription would take the form of the 'excellence of an exceptional message,' a message (de)posited within the 'square letters' of the Torah; a message which, although 'addressed to all,' attests to the (s)election of a people (the Jews) and the 'uncomfortable privilege' borne by them (*AC* 199). A privilege, what is more, that is concomitant with the principia that open the field of Levinasian ethics. Bloechl's comments are, I think, once again insightful here. Bloechl notes that: 'one might well experience something like what Levinas describes,' but it is 'another matter to discern from that experience the consequences he prescribes' (Bloechl 2000, 234). To my mind, and here I am in agreement with Bloechl, the imbroglio between description and prescription (where what is prescribed is at once a proscription) is never resolved in Levinas' work, for reasons I hope to clarify in due course. To this extent, one may legitimately characterize the encounter with the 'face' as an instance of ethico-phenomenological embroilment. One cannot quite be sure if Levinas' description of the face is a presentation (*presentation*) or an allocation (*prestation*) of sense.

The ethical situation (*scène*) Levinas enunciates – the effectuation of the face and its facing me (*MG* 57) – is enigmatic. The face is an enigma because through it someone presents him or herself beyond, behind, and in the midst of the scattering dispersion of presentifications occasioned by the countenance and the plasticity of its form. The translucent space or 'clearing' (*die Lichtung*) within which manifestive beings disclose themselves to the purview of sight is suffused with darkness, the *Lichtung* is offset against the obscurity of its *Dickung*. Phenomenology, as such, is arguably the science of (dis)appearance. The rifts fissuring these innumerable presentifications are the passageways, or *πόροι*, through which the enigma of the face enters the world. Indeed, the ontological difference, opened in the *Riss* between Being and beings, is arguably rethought by Levinas here as the rift (suggesting at once both *fissure* and *désaccord*) between face and form; namely between that which can be stated and that which contests constation, the difference of distantiation that marks the interval of separation between another and myself. As Levinas explains:

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<sup>10</sup> This encounter, or heteronomous experience, signals the imposition of a heterological order.

The face enters into our world from an absolutely foreign sphere [...] from an absolute, which in fact is the very name for ultimate strangeness. The signifyingness of a face in its abstractness is in the literal sense of the term extra-ordinary (*MS 53*).

The face is extraordinary, yet it presents itself amidst the banality of everyday life. Conversation presages the arrival of the face and the common place of speech is its very *lieu de naissance* (or perhaps its *maison natale* should we recall Heidegger's famous dictum that 'Language is the house of Being' (Heidegger, 1947, 259)). The 'strangeness' (*étrangeté*) of the face, through which the 'stranger' (*étranger*) introduces him or herself, is not so much a *bizarrie*, as it is the very oddity of the ordinary. This extra-ordinariness (the excellence of the ordinary, one might say) may well be, as Levinas proposes, the 'literal' sense of the face, however such literality is itself littoral for the face arrives 'from another shore [*d'une autre rive*]' (*TI 171; Tel 186*). The face is 'alien,' for it is somehow at once both 'otherworldly' and the 'origin' of the meaning of the world. Moreover, it 'remains terrestrial' (*TI 203*), for it is that which accomplishes the sense by which terrene life is oriented. The face, so understood, is thus the cradle of civilization (*berceau de la civilisation*).

In order to explicate the pure saying proper to ethical proximity, Levinas deems it necessary to 'revert to the hither side of civilization' (*OBBE 198n.7*). Yet, the relationship between the face and civilization remains problematic. For I would argue, that that which signifies as a face, signifies precisely as that which is acknowledged by a given culture to be of optimal value within the axiological range it recognises. The optima of the face may well signify otherwise than those values enshrined in the practices, beliefs and injunctions of a given culture. However, a distinction must be made between the fact that there is signification, and the specific and culturally nuanced ways in which such signification is constituted (or civilized) within the cultural nexus of values from whence it issues and against which it signifies. For, as Husserl intimates, it is in conformity with the laws encoded in intersubjective 'constitutive systems,' systems that are 'actualisable' by the individual ego, that the 'sense,' or 'meaning,' which in this instance the face may have, exists for an ego (*CM §37*). I contend, therefore, that despite differentiating between signification and significancy (and despite his antipathy toward the kind of systematism Husserl underscores above), Levinas does not provide an adequate account of the generation of signification and the consistency of his argument suffers as a result. Can Levinas' descriptions of the face really avoid committing themselves to a certain axiological bearing (*tonalité axiologique*), one may ask?

Of course, Levinas will insist that value, in its 'original radiation,' signifies before any 'intentional movement' without there being a 'free attitude toward value that could be taken up' (OBBE 198n.28). The face is the 'origin of value and good,' he declares (PGTI 199). The ethical factum, he states, 'owes nothing to values,' for the 'Good,' rendered concrete, 'is the *worth*' of the other person (D 147). Responsibility for the other person is, quite simply, 'outside of the axiological bipolarity' in which values are thematized and set forth (HA 136). One may well concur with Levinas here. But such a response hardly mitigates against the criticism advanced above. For firstly, it confirms, albeit inadvertently, that the recognition of value (here one's sensitivity to the face post impressible susception) is a by-product of inculcation and acculturation. Inveterate tendencies, sedimented habits, and accepted mores establish the forum, a forum or ἀγορά that arguably subtends the field of ethics (*champs éthique*) Levinas charts, within which that which signifies as a face is welcomed as such. This appears to hold even if Levinas associates the notion of 'welcome' (*accueil*) with the repose of domiciliary life (indeed, the Hebrew word for 'welcome,' הלבק, is, somewhat tellingly, also that for 'tradition'). The values intimated here being, as it were, indigenous to the home-world (*Heimwelt*) he itemizes under this heading. Domiciliary life, we will recall, is the sphere encompassing all that is familiar and familial. In the idiom of phenomenology, it is the sum of those access routes that open a world for us; a haven in the midst of the elemental, secured for possession.<sup>11</sup> And while one might agree with Levinas that the 'meaningful' is not 'architectonic,' and need not be 'expressed in architectural terms' (JW 80), its staging does, invariably, require structural support.

To be sure, Levinas will maintain that the face interrupts the sphere of the 'same' (TI 67) and that exposedness rather than receptivity is the mark of the ethical. One suffers the face as the burden of the being one takes up, the levity of nutrimental existence awakens to the gravity of ethical life (one's selfhood is one's love for the neighbour, this 'work' is 'like yourself' Levinas argues (QA 90)): radical passivity defines the encounter with the face, we recall. However, even if we accept the proposals Levinas volunteers, are we not compelled to question the guise under which they are proposed? If the face teaches the first lesson (I am no autodidact), the lesson in which I am assigned my ontological place and in which I am assigned to myself,

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<sup>11</sup> It is precisely because Levinas identifies axiology with the ataraxy of domiciliary life (the 'dwelling' being a trope for the sphere of the 'same') that he would refuse to accept the critique presented here. For Levinas, axiology is prone to become 'a "cognition" of values or of what ought to be,' and 'practice' is likewise apt to become 'the cognition of what is to be done' (OBBE 65).



then does it not also follow that I am similarly bequeathed an axiological inheritance? Am I not taught to recognize the face as a face and schooled so as to maximize my facial recognition? Apropos of Levinas, the 'contact' which defines ethical proximity, the 'point' at which the epiphany of the face becomes proximity, teaches nothing 'but the contact, by the contact itself.' Contact teaches only the 'very fact of saying and learning,' one might argue (*LP* 121).

Clearly, the impact of the face is felt, as it were, 'after the fact' (*après coup*). According to the diachronic logic set forth in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, I am a late arrival on the 'scene,' I am always in arrears (consciousness is always late for the 'rendezvous with the neighbor,' Levinas asserts (*LP* 119)). However, am I not also affected by others, others whose traumatic incursions into my dwelling remain somehow subterfuge (even repressed), others whose faces do not quite surface because the gaze they direct toward me is concealed beneath the surfaces and hides I 'see' before me? Has Levinas not, in fact, limited the 'traumatism of astonishment [*traumatisme de l'étonnement*]' (*TI* 73; *TeI* 71) that such faces might inflict by failing to include them within the range of what he permits to signify as a face? If the 'persecution' of the face 'crosses a night of unconsciousness,' and if, indeed, ethical 'trauma' is 'without warning' (*OBBE* 197n.27), then how is such a delimitation warranted? Again, if the 'Good' has 'taken possession of the subject before the subject had the time necessary for choice' (*HA* 134), that is, if the subjecting character of responsibility exceeds the deliberation of choice, then can one determine the terms of the 'facing position' as Levinas is wont to do? It appears as if, and this is the brunt of Levinas' own criticism of Husserl's analysis of internal time consciousness, a trace of volition remains on the *thither* side of the *hither* side of constitution. Is the subject-hostage not imputed with a certain freedom, therefore, despite Levinas' insistence to the contrary?

For the anarchic trauma Levinas details here to be truly anarchic (a trauma 'suffered prior to any auto-identification,' Levinas will argue (*OBBE* 123)), the subject would have to remain incapable of assuming what it receives. Susceptibility, as we will discover in due course, is susceptibility in spite of itself (*OBBE* 102), susceptibility beyond and prior to thematization. The neighbour – the near one – is not 'clothed with cultural attributes,' Levinas urges, and signifies in a manner altogether distinct from the way in which 'the "mineral" surfaces of things' (*OBBE* 191n.10) and the 'animal,' in its 'brutish dumbness' (*PII* 55), obsess one – if, indeed, they obsess one at all. But, is the 'near one' not assumed prior to his or her susception? Is the neighbour one whose propinquity to me is determined by their belonging to the same

species as me? It seems as if the Other belongs to the same *τάξις* as me (we participate in the same species-being) even if 'he' composes 'his' own *γένος*. A doctrine of participation is thus operative at the heart of Levinasian first philosophy (*philosophie première*) despite Levinas' censorious remarks regarding the standing of so called philosophies of 'participation.' It seems as if Levinas cannot quite extricate himself from the 'community of genus and form,' after all (*OBBE* 8).<sup>12</sup> It may be that language, 'in terms of genus and species' (terms which promote the notion of a 'human race'), only recovers its 'rights' after the event of ethical intrigue. Taxonomical distinctions, so Levinas will claim, are themselves 'founded' upon the 'fraternity' of the face-to-face relation (*LP* 123). However, this proto-taxonomical fraternity already admits of classificatory qualification, for it excludes the 'animal' and the 'mineral' from the brood of the ethical brotherhood (*confrérie*) it institutes.

One must, on this basis at least, concede that assumption and susception are coeval. As Levinas himself intimates in *Totality and Infinity*, a line of thought he generally retracts in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* where he seeks to expedite all traces of the actional from his account of the ethical subject, the 'welcome' of the other person 'expresses a *simultaneity* of activity and passivity,' a simultaneity, let us note, that enables one to distinguish between the relation with the Other and the 'dichotomies valid for things' (*TI* 89; emphasis added). Although in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas will characterize susception as a 'coincidence' of activity and passivity (*OBBE* 115), the general drift of his argument in this text and, indeed, in later works, is that the self as expiation is 'prior to activity and passivity' (*OBBE* 116). Yet again, despite enlisting the support of countless hyperbolic tropes (the self is a 'passivity more passive still than the passivity of matter,' we are informed (*OBBE* 113)), does Levinas not contradict himself when he claims that the relationship with the other 'precedes the auto-affection of certainty' (*OBBE* 119)? For, not only is the applicability of the face restricted to the human creature, but the face faces me, as we have seen, in quite specific ways. The field of the proto-ethical is so clearly defined by Levinas – at one point he confers that the 'ethical' admits of an 'exact range [*étendue exacte*]' (*BW* 49; *EO* 76) – that either one must accept, as he argues, that the face of the human other signifies in an exclusively ethical sense (and moreover that this sense is limited to the human other), or, one must award the intervention of the 'third party' (*le tiers*) a greater status in Levinas'

<sup>12</sup> Does the face, in its particular Levinasian configuration, not depend upon a set of genera, a set of genera that condition, as it were, the possibility of its being a 'face,' and 'facing' me, in contradiction to the *façade* of the thing which does not?

thinking than he is willing to admit. Hence, the third party – the sphere of the social, the communal, and, of course, the conceptual – establishes the vectors of the space within which the subject *comes to acknowledge* the face as injunctive.

Needless to say, Levinas will maintain that the posita of communal being are suspended in the reduction to the ‘saying’ he executes. However, such posita (and the ‘commitments’ they elicit) are evidently in play during the encounter with the Other. If this were not the case, one would be hard pressed to explain cultural variations in signification. To the Jain of North-West India, for example, the insect signifies ethically such that one is obligated to don the appropriate footwear and be mindful of one’s step when walking. To Levinas, such thinking is fundamentally confused, and is, no doubt, indicative of the kinds of ‘fads’ from Asia he believes compromise the rigor of ‘Western’ thought and captivate a largely fickle European youth (AGCW 176).

Commenting upon the exodus of the Jewish people from captivity in Egypt, Levinas will admonish the pharaonic ‘way of taking human faces for grasshoppers’ (PLPL 68), yet his admonition of the heinous treatment of the Jews during this period of bondage does not prevent him from excluding the aforementioned ‘creatures’ from ethical consideration. The reader would be forgiven for finding the above critique somewhat pedantic. It is not my intention to promulgate an entomological ethic. Far from it. My criticisms are directed toward the structuration of the proto-ethical space Levinas describes, a space always already crossed by the significations of culture, I would argue (and intersected by the axis of what I will call, following Levinas’ lead, tertiality (*tiertialité*)), and thus not protomorphic in the manner Levinas claims. The ‘simultaneity’ Levinas deduces in *Totality and Infinity* between susception and reception arguably pertains throughout the ethical encounter, as he maintains (even if simultaneity is later rethought as the coincidence of activity and passivity that defines the being of the subject-hostage (OBBE 57)). However, as I will endeavour to demonstrate, I do not believe Levinas provides a thorough enough account of receptivity and he is thus not able to justify the limitations he imposes upon the field of ethics convincingly. The ‘Da’ of *Dasein* may be an ‘ethical’ problem, as Levinas suggests (AB 48), but the ‘ici,’ of *me voici*, is unquestionably a heritable one.

Might such an interpretation of the face not allow us to deepen our understanding of what Levinas means by filiality (TI 278)? The ‘son’ is not simply begotten. The ideational and symbolic forms that ‘house’ its ‘parents’ are borne (and born) along with it. The ‘son’ inhabits this dwelling before ‘he’ is in a position to



accept it qua constituting 'ego.' Sense constitution is thus a direct product of patrilineage (*Totality and Infinity*) and matrilineage (*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*); arguably it is their heir. Levinas' thought is thus committed to the notion of a certain phenomenological heredity, that is, to the generative dissemination of sense (*filiation*) between existents. In being heritable, or fecund, sense is dislodged from its egological foundations (*Fundierungen*). My ability (and it remains an 'ability' despite any initial susception to which 'I' am vulnerable, an ability, which we might, with Ricoeur, call the phenomenon of 'self-attestation' (Ricoeur, 1992, 355)) to heed the face as that which obligates me ethically, is predicated upon my pre-predicative experience of 'tuition,' and my genealogical indebtedness to my 'parents' (where the terms in question are liberated from the strictures of their biological and pedagogical connotations and determined phenomenologically). Moreover, phenomenologically, 'tuition' presupposes the encounter with the face, and its facing me, which Levinas' philosophy is dedicated to expounding.

The dimension of height in which the face opens, thus extends both vertically and generatively. Indeed, vectorially, a parity obtains between heritability and verticality. Structurally, the face-to-face relation is the precursor to sense constitution. The conceptual armature that enables me to synopsise the other person and understand them, despite their multifariousness and differences from me, the schemata through which I negotiate the complexities of my being-in-the-world (my coping mechanisms, one might say), schemata that are at once both conceptual and corporeal (I inhabit postures, poses and positions, in addition to commandeering ideas and grasping concepts – one works with tools and concepts, alike), are bequeathed to me. I am a man or woman of substance only to the degree that I 'inherit' the estate of my being (the condition of my creaturality (*créaturalité*)) from others. Creation, as such, is a relation of transcendence – a relation 'of union and fecundity' – and it is this that conditions the 'positing' of my 'unique being:' my ipseity originates in this event (*TI* 279). The position from which 'I' encounter the Other is in a state of being formed during the encounter with them. My commencement qua 'me' is ongoing. As Levinas suggests, 'the oneself cannot form itself,' as it is 'already formed with passivity' (*OBBE* 104).

I simultaneously bear my forebears in me (the other-in-the-same) and am borne along by them. As such, I am amphibological, something of a contradiction in terms, adrift across time(s): the 'product' of disseminative dissipation. Of course, all others are arguably my forebears, because any encounter I may have with an other, is an encounter with one who has passed by. The Other always precedes me because the

Other interrupts the time of my coincidence with myself. The Other, therefore, both schismatizes and schematizes the schemata that permit me to cope with my worldly being (where such coping is neither practical nor theoretical but proto-ethical) and bear the burden of its demands upon me. The figure, or schema, of the face sets the schematism of (the) understanding to work. The face, thereby, effects a deformation of space and time, as pure intuitional forms, and reconfigures them as the passage from interiority to metaphysical exteriority. In this way, as heritor or heritrix, my being of-the-other is indissociable from my being for-the-other. Through a curious doubling of sense, therefore, I am forχof the Other.<sup>13</sup> The genitive 'of' is at once both subjective and objective. Auto-affection is, one might say, always already hetero-affection. The 'for' (*pour*), of my being for-the-other, expresses an orientation or bearing within being, rather than a grammatical case (even if, as Levinas will say, 'I' am declined (deposed) in the accusative, and receive 'my' being (qua 'me') in the dative (*GP* 144)). As Levinas himself concedes, the 'past limits the infinitude of being' (inherited precepts, formulations, and modes of comportment, thus limit and delimit the scope of what *manifests itself from itself* and presents itself καθ' αὐτό), and this limitation is 'given' as 'senescence' (*TI* 278).

It is not simply that *one ages in the world* (a notion to be discussed in part two, where the problem of ethical 'maturation' will be broached). The thought that thinks the Other, in response to his or her provocation – whether this thought persists subvocally and in private, or is committed to the page – is a thought already grown senescent, a thought disposed to aging, a thought, therefore, forever at odds with the youthful epiphany (juvenescence) of the face it would describe. Can thought, which, as noted, is ever late upon the 'scene' Levinas charts, really determine what one might call 'enigmaticity,' and legislate its limits (the way, perhaps, that in Husserl and Heidegger phenomenality is confined to objectivity and beingness), if it is aged from the moment of its inception, and if the passing of the 'near one' cannot be retrieved through recuperative acts?

Perhaps thought ages as, and through, astonishment (*étonnement*). The surprise, or *start*, thought undergoes in the face of the Other does not cause it to age (which would be to set this whole procedure within the bounds of causality), but is the very senescence of thought itself, a prolongation of the wonder (θαυμάζειν) in which

<sup>13</sup> Throughout my study of Levinas I have deployed the Greek letter *chi* (χ) to draw attention to the placement of terms in a relationship of apposition to one another. This is not done for stylistic purposes, but rather to accent a relationship of creative tension between terms, such that their sense (*sens*) might be exhibited upon the basis of their chiasmic (dis)accord.

philosophy is purported to begin. As such, Levinasian first philosophy might be taken to be a branch of gerontology – a veritable science of aging – provided that one recall that the trauma by which thought ages is a thauma that ‘astonishes finitude’ (CDNM 51). As Marion remarks, the Other’s arrival, or advent (one of four saturated phenomena discussed by Marion), is accomplished as an ‘unpredictable landing.’ The initiative of the ‘I’ is restricted to ‘remaining ready’ to ‘receive the shock’ of what Marion calls, the Other’s ‘anamorphosis’ (Marion, 2002, 132). I do not know what ‘form’ the Other will take, or the conduit through which alterity will strike me, especially if the subject is conceived, as it is by Levinas, as a passivity beyond preparative reception. However, does Levinas not attempt to predict the Other’s landing, and, in so doing, does he not (inadvertently) beach the Other and mollify the shock of his/her/its arrival, despite the fact that the anonymity of the *il y a* purportedly haunts the pronominal *il* of *illéité* in which a face shows itself? Does the ethical subject (*me voici*) determine what does and does not pass for ‘unpredictable’? What principle (ἀρχή) is at work, or in play, here? These are questions of paramount significance, I would argue, questions to which the reader of Levinas’ must constantly return.

#### § 4. *The face and the physiognomy*

According to Levinas, the face, qua ethical signifier, discountenances the plastic form of the human face, taking flight from the light of thematization. The face overwhelms the plasticity of the countenance, which discloses itself to the public scrutiny of the gaze. There is decidedly more to the Other *than meets the eye* (perhaps one is also exposed to the *there is* (*il y a*) in the eyeXface (*panim*) of the Other – *illeity* and *ilyaity* are crossed to the point of confusion, Levinas insists (TPA 224)). The countenance is given through its form, thus affording the ego the opportunity to represent it to itself, an opportunity granted through a certain lapse of time, a lapse that permits the ‘I’ to defer responsibility for the face that has passed it by. The face, however, signifies with such immediacy – an ‘anachronous immediacy,’ no less – that it collapses the image into which representation would fashion it, and destroys the ‘death mask’ (*masque mortuaire*) into which it would be forced to congeal (OBBE 91; AE 145).

It is paramount, therefore, that the ‘face’ and the ‘countenance’ not be confused. For any confluence between them would jeopardize the sanctity of the other person who transcends her image and cannot be accounted for in terms of physicality, gait, or even the idiosyncrasies of facial expression and the tonal variations of the

voice. A face is 'dissimulated' by 'the physiognomy,' Levinas argues (*OBBE* 93). These idiosyncrasies are rather the idiolocalities through which the face breaches its form. For Levinas, it is not so much that our unique differences set us apart or engender the *Kedousha*, or separation (*séparation*), integral to ethicality. Rather, the spacing through which such difference emerges is the 'production' of the altogether more primal spacing (*espacement*) of the face-to-face relation. The Other is, to be sure, quirky (*cinglé*), and the face enters the world (in somewhat Joycean fashion) at a jaunty angle – the intervalic space between the self and the Other is 'curved,' we recall. However, any behavioural, personality, and even sartorial eccentricities, the Other might possess do not compound to generate the face; the Other 'is already an object through his clothing' (*EE* 40). As Llewelyn confers, 'my empirical nakedness' might actually 'serve as a clothing' and 'my empirical poverty might serve as a property coming between the other and me as the other's absolute servant' (Llewelyn, 2000, 127). Thus, the nudity of ethical 'frankness' (*franchise*) literally strips me of the raiment of my ontico-phenomenological form, remoulding me in the figure of a vassal. Physical difference, Levinas will maintain, offers no rationale for ethical responsibility. 'Reason,' on the contrary, is ratified by 'signification,' and the 'first rationality gleams forth in the opposition of the face to face [*luit la rationalité première*]' (*TI* 208; *TeI* 229).

This divergence between the 'countenance' and the 'face' is contentious. Critics will argue (among them notably: Rudi Visker, Dominique Janicaud, and Luce Irigaray) that in order to be for the other person who faces me, account must be taken of their specificity. Some kind of general 'audit' of their 'qualities,' or personality 'profile' (a profile in which the various profiles silhouetted by the empirical countenance are synthesized), is required, or rather demanded, in order that their own unique needs are best honoured: sexual difference, together with racial, religious, generation, and, of course, physical difference(s), being a case in point. Levinas response to this line of argumentation is consistent. The 'ethical,' he suggests, does not designate an 'inoffensive attenuation of passionate particularisms,' for the face obligates beyond such differences (*LP* 116).

It may be, that at the level of 'ethics,' one is obligated to consider the differences enumerated here as basic to any response one might make toward the other person. However, the proto-ethical superstructure elucidated by Levinas is logically (and chronologically) anterior to the mandates that order the principia of

ethics.<sup>14</sup> The singularity of the face – which we might term Levinas’ principle of individuation – commands before and beyond the multiplicity of factors of which one must be cognizant in order to comport oneself ethically in a given situation. Levinas’ ethic is no situation ethic. The face, which signifies prior to the legislature of ethics, and prior to the law the moral agent gives him or herself in consonance with the ordinances of rationality, is in *situs* (while remaining a-topic) prior to the situations analysed by the ethical sciences: The face-to-face (*face-à-face*) is the ‘ultimate situation’ (*situation ultime*), Levinas will insist (*TI* 81; *TeI* 80). The ‘naturalism’ of ethical ‘theory’ thus requires reduction. Levinas is the progenitor of a fundamental or pre-originary ethic (or, to be more precise, an an-archic ethic), an ‘ethic’ that uncovers the structural subsoil of factual life. Yet, Levinas does not claim to have discovered the ‘transcendental foundation’ of ‘ethical experience,’ because ethics ‘breaks up’ the ‘originary unity of transcendental apperception’ (*OBBE* 148). As such, Levinas’ believes his project is perhaps best described as an ‘an-archaeology [*an-archéologie*]’ (*AE* 19; *OBBE* 7).

The extent to which this refutation obviates the severity of the aforementioned critique is moot. Levinas’ thought is clearly not immune to such criticism. The lengthy exposition of Levinas’ teaching on the face engaged here will prove instructive in due course. We will shortly be in a position to assess the merits of Levinas’ account of the face and examine more closely the criticisms inveighed against him.

Despite decrying the suggestion that the face can be stated in terms of ‘consciousness,’ that is, ‘in metaphors referring to light and the sensible,’ (*TI* 207) Levinas deploys photological leitmotifs to convey the ‘production of infinity’ engendered by the face-to-face relationship. Thus, he catalogues variously: the infinite which ‘paralyses power’ and ‘gleams in the face of the other [*luit dans le visage*’ (*TI* 199; *TeI* 217); the ‘gleam of exteriority [*l’éclat de l’extériorité*’ or ‘transcendence in the face of the Other’ (*TI* 24; *TeI* 10); the ‘trace’ which ‘lights up as the face of a neighbor [*trace qui luit comme visage du prochain*’ (*OBBE* 12; *AE* 26); the ‘glow of the trace [*la luisance de la trace*’ which ‘bypasses’ the present (*OBBE* 12; *AE* 27);

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<sup>14</sup> In an interview with Richard Kearney in 1986, Levinas draws attention to an important distinction between the ethical and the moral, offering the following by way of clarification: ‘By morality I mean a series of rules relating to social behaviour and civic duty. But while morality thus operates in the socio-political order of organizing and improving our human survival, it is ultimately founded on an ethical responsibility towards the other [...] ethics as a ‘dis-inter-estedness’ ... is a form of vigilant passivity to the call of the other, which precedes our interest in being [...] Morality is what governs the world of political ‘inter-estedness,’ the social interchanges between citizens in a society.’ (Cohen, 1986, 29).



and the ‘blinking light [*lumière clignotante*]’ of revelation occasioned by the ‘question mark’ in the ‘said’ which continuously crosses it (*OBBE* 154; *AE* 240). The last of these (and there are numerous examples within the Levinasian corpus), the ‘blinking light’ as Levinas refers to it, is of particular import. For this light (*lumière clignotante*), shed by the face, conveys the latter’s enigmatic nature through the invocation of a kind of chiaroscuro, a crepuscular space in which the ‘light’ of revelation (*revelation*), and the ‘shade’ of the ‘trace’ in which the Other ‘lurks [*se love*],’ commingle (*OBBE* 93; *AE* 198). On the one hand, the face is its own light source, it expresses itself καθ’ αὐτό, and ‘to be καθ’ αὐτό is to be good’ (*TI* 183) – the ‘Good’ being synonymous with the Platonic ἀγαθόν or ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας described by Socrates in the *Republic* in heliotropic imagery. The face emits its own supernal light and its ‘manifestation’ in the world is thus not disclosed to the lighted region of consciousness within which, as previously remarked, the quiddity of ‘things,’ according to Levinas, is illuminated. On the other hand, and this is the implication of Derrida’s critique in ‘Violence and Metaphysics,’ the absolutism of the face, and the ‘shimmer of infinity [*ruissellement de l’infini*]’ (*TI* 207; *TeI* 227) it commissions and sends forth into the world, are nevertheless constituted, despite the face’s *sui generis* provocation, as a disruption of normal perceptual experience.

In the encounter with the face, the typicality of one’s perceptual grasp is interrupted. The efficacy of perception is challenged from without (and from within, for the borders between interiority and exteriority are routinely challenged by Levinas) and the ego’s rule is devastated by a foreign investiture (i.e., the imposition of a heteronomy suffered or ‘experienced’ as a hetero-affection). The *Ichzentrum* is thus literally dis-appointed [*dés-appointé*] (*SAS* 158). It remains the case, however, that the interruption adumbrated here is possible for consciousness. That it is an adumbration is confirmed by the fact that the face casts a shadow across the pure Ego (*reines Ich*), forestalling its noetic activity, and because the interruptive event gives itself, qua enigma, as that which undoes form, under the aspect of shadow. This ‘event’ (*événement*) can be made the correlate of a noetic act precisely qua interruption. Of course, Levinas will rejoin, the ego, somnolent and complacent in its repose, is able to appraise its own inadequacy. The ethical *Sinngebung* Levinas deduces does not so much highlight a relationship of inadequation between *noeses* and *noemata* – here the status of the Other as a noematic object would retain its primacy – but rather suggests that the intentional couplet ‘noesis-noema’ is itself inadequate to the upsurge of the face within the ego’s primordial sphere (*TI* 67). If the ego were not ‘awakened’ to this deficiency within itself, Levinas’ redaction of first

philosophy as 'morality' (TI 304) would falter hopelessly. Philosophy in its 'diachronic' configuration is, after all, the 'consciousness of the break up of consciousness,' Levinas will insist (OBBE 165).

The ego is capable of bestowing meaning upon the disturbance it suffers. This disturbance discloses itself to phenomenological regard. However, the gaze that would interrogate its own 'intersection' – 'vision is crossed by speech,' Levinas argues (TI 195) – attempts 'after the fact' (*après coup*) (TI 54) to reconstruct the breaching of its defences. For the ego's 'apostrophization' by the Other (*status quo ante*), an 'apostrophization,' no less, that testifies to the peculiar and inane logic of the 'anterior posteriorly' (*antérieure postérieurement*) – inane because the logicity of formal logic is emptied of sense, and because the event (*événement*) it describes dumbfounds the ego, stupefying it (TI 170; TeI 184) – brings to light the very exposition of this event. The encounter with the face is the *mise-en-scène* for an ontological *mise en lumière* (TI 26; TeI 11).

The ambiguity evidenced by the term 'production' enables Levinas to circumvent the problem of whether or not the face might be said to be 'disclosed,' because it attests to an 'operation' (*opération*) by which 'the being of an entity' is 'simultaneously' 'brought about' and 'revealed' (*s'évertue l'être d'une entité et par laquelle il se révèle*) (TI 26; TeI 11) through its very exposure to the face of the Other. It is the being of this entity that is illuminated and not that of the Other whose withdrawal from the ethical scene (*scène*) is marked by the disruption of the ego's phenomenal field so deftly analysed by Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*, then, offers a defence of subjectivity, and *Otherwise than Being* provides a reflection upon the amphibological subject. Ultimately, Levinas attempts nothing less than a 'rehabilitation of the subject,' one might argue (MG 58).<sup>15</sup> Of course, the ambiguity highlighted here is itself revealed in the encounter with the Other as the alternance of constitution (activity) and constituted (passivity): an alternance, which defines the interval of 'dead time' (*temps mort*) – the time of production – that marks the passage between the effectuated and that which effectuates it, albeit, as that which has always already elapsed (TI 54).

The being of the existent is brought to light as a deficit. Its being is its perforation by the Other; monadic being is defenestrated. This punctuation, in which

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<sup>15</sup> *Totality and Infinity* claims, after all, to be 'a defence of subjectivity' (TI 26). Thus despite underscoring the inability of thought to 'comprehend' the face, Levinas preserves the integrity of the subject, *qua me voici*, against the onslaught of impersonal regimes and totalizing enterprises.



the ego quite literally animadverts to its inadequacy before the face, 'reveals' the placing in the ego of what Levinas will call, the idea of infinity. The infinite (the in-the-finite), to which we will return proximately, heightens the meaning accorded to Levinas' radical empiricism by emphasizing, once again, that the ego is given to itself as such (as retardation or senescence) only through the encounter with the face. This radical empiricism does not, therefore, purport to describe an 'ethical experience,' but instead seeks to communicate the 'intrigue' of the paradox of the 'infinite in relation' (WE 200). Taken strictly, the relation with the Other – the face is the τόπος where the infinite is produced, a 'place' that is literally ἄτοπος, both in the sense of being strange and out of place – is accomplished as a failure of experience and the dissatisfaction of intuitive fulfilment. Against the horizon of the beyond (less, perhaps, a horizon than a limit (*limite*), although not a limit that circumscribes, but rather one which traverses and transverses the work of ethics), Levinas permits the apparition of that which does not appear, to appear as such. To appear, that is, as that which does not appear, to appear as the non-apparitional. The reduction(s) he implements, allow the enigmatical to produce itself (and *show itself forth from itself*) as an enigma. As Levinas suggests in the essay 'Language and Proximity' (1967), 'to come facing' is precisely to 'manifest oneself by undoing one's manifestation' (LP 121).

Undoing one's manifestation? Where production, as we have seen, is an altogether ambiguous enterprise in *Totality and Infinity*, the attempt to reduce being's other to its assembly in the said is designated, by Levinas, as a 'betrayal' (*trahison*) in *Otherwise than Being*. This betrayal, which, as Dennis Keenan observes, denotes both 'to mislead and to reveal' (Keenan, 1999, 22), adverts to the 'extreme situation' of 'diachronic thought,' a thought given to leading the saying to betray itself in the very themes and statements that would dissimulate it. Such betrayal, exceeds its status as a methodological procedure, Levinas opines, because it is 'the very task of philosophy [*la tâche même de la philosophie*]' (OBBE 7; AE 19); a task requiring the audacity of scepticism (*scepticisme*), since it must venture to affirm the 'impossibility of statement,' while confirming this 'impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility' (OBBE 7; AE 19).

The face is an anomaly in the world (a glitch in the 'economic' system, de-systematising totality) and its 'irregularity' is nowhere more apparent than in its distortion of phenomenological protocol. Levinas describes the face as an 'enigma' (*énigme*) to contrast it with the 'indiscreet and victorious appearing of a phenomenon' (EP 70), and outlines its divergence from the ontico-phenomenological countenance.

The 'whole body – a hand or a curve of the shoulder – can express as the face' Levinas asserts (*TI* 262): even the rib can signify as such (*NTR* 169). Despite Levinas' description of the face as a 'head' that does not 'find a place to lay itself' (*TI* 299), the face remains phenomenologically aloof. For, the face signifies as a 'head' through the medium of the Other's suffering. Yet, paradoxically, the face is itself destitute, for it cannot be 'laid bare,' or subjected to interpretation (*Auslegung*), as such (while according to Levinas it *lays itself out in me* as the idea of the infinite-in-me). Again, the interplay between the ontico-phenomenological and the ethical is evidenced here. Yet, this very non-phenomenal face 'looks at me looking' (*TI* 98). It witnesses the ruse by which I would seek to represent 'it' to myself. The total transparency of 'its gaze' is 'directed' upon 'my gaze,' Levinas asserts (*TI* 182). As Derrida observes, the face 'exchanges its glance' with me (Derrida, 1978, 98). Do I then 'perceive' this gaze?

If, as Levinas admits, the 'eye does not shine' but rather 'speaks' (*TI* 66) – vision is striated by discourse – then the gaze that meets my gaze is less a case of the Other being sighted (and my being sightable), as it is of my being cited or summoned by 'him.' This being cited is a citation to appear or show up for the Other, the Other being the *régisseur* of the production, or *mise-en-scène*, in which 'I' am *mise en question*. It is tempting to interpret this summons to appear, or ethical subpoena (*NGTT* 127), as an 'ethical' counterpart to the appearance of phenomena (φαινόμενα) given to the intentional regard. Again, however, despite the fact that, for Levinas, the subject is given to him or herself (qua conatus) through the affect of 'shame' (*honte*) – shame being precisely a 'movement in a direction opposed to that of consciousness,' an expulsion from oneself (*TH* 17) – the subject is not reified by the Other. Levinas subverts and inverts 'objectifying cognition' (*TI* 67), such that the Other does not 'constitute' me so much as 'create' me. Hence, that which is 'aimed at unseats the intentionality which aims at it' (*TH* 16), yet without this movement simply being counter-intentional as if it were the dialectical equivalent to the ego's intentional gaze. Jean-Luc Marion's comments are perspicuous in this regard and summarize Levinas' position here succinctly. Marion notes that:

The gaze that comes upon me provides no spectacle, therefore no immediately visible or assignable intuition; it resides precisely in the black holes of the two pupils, in the sole and miniscule space where, on the surface of the body of the Other, there is nothing to see (not even the colour of the iris that surrounds them) in the gaze facing me. The gaze that the Other casts and makes weigh on me therefore does not give itself to my gaze, nor even to be seen – this invisible gaze gives itself only to be endured. The Other is charged to me:

strictly speaking, he weighs on my gaze like a weight, a burden (Marion, 2002, 232).

The gaze that the Other directs toward me, gives me to myself qua responsal. The enigma of the face teaches me the lesson of my self, and therefore gives itself as that which I am under an obligation to bear.

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas will allude to a 'listening eye' (OBBE 38), an 'eye that listens' with 'a resonance unique in its kind' (OBBE 30). Here, then, the ocular is crossed with the otic – the eye at once auriform – in a reconfiguration (a figuration effectuated by the figure of the face) of the body's orificial schema. The eye hearkens to the face through the contours of its form. The optical order is reframed according to the injunction of the face. Not only are the ocular and the otic deliberately confused by Levinas, but the two are at once crossed with the mouth such that the physical substrate of speech (simultaneously the site of annunciation, mastication, gustation, osculation and fellation) signifies, qua face, as that which beseeches me to attend to the Other's need, and as the place from which I tear the bread of my material existence in a supererogatory gesture of substitution (bread here already refers to the 'incarnate subject' who has 'earned it in the sweat of his' or her 'brow' (OBBE 191n.7)). Such decussation (the crossing of the oculo-otic and the oral) highlights a situation of phenomenological hybridity at the heart of Levinas' account of the face. A peculiarly ethical synaesthesia (a condition not treated by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*) is effected through my bearing the other person. The physiological function (ἐργον) of the body is reduced to its ethical basis. The body's orifices are no longer merely (sensory) gateways that open onto beings but are, rather, *points of contact* through which one *enters into contact* with the Other; loci for the dramatization of ethical proximity, as it were (LP 116).

Qua ego, the subject may escape 'its own critical eye' on account of its constitutive freedom, which permits it to 'take refuge' in the very eye that judges it' (OBBE 92; emphasis added). This dwelling place is sundered under the gaze of another, however, insofar as the ego is reduced to a self – consciousness cedes to conscience – and the imperious 'I' is reduced to an assignable 'me' (consciousness and subjectivity are clearly not commensurable terms in Levinas' philosophy). This eyexface rends the sphere of pure consciousness and exposes me, in passivity and obedience, to the Other. I am weighted with a surfeit of responsibilities, which exceed my capability, and are disproportionate to what I may accomplish as a finite creature. My assignation is thus a kind of 'death on order,' Levinas suggests, as if the gaze of

the Other that falls upon me, were tantamount to my dying 'on the mouth of God' (OBBE 200n.1). One must not, I think, conflate this 'death' with the terminus of life, however (although my being for-the-other, to the point of expiration, might entail my dying for the Other). Here, death ultimately signifies the 'shaking' of 'my conatus;' that is, the 'shaking and inversion' of 'my persistence in being' (NM 164) – the deposition of (my) positionality as such.

The ambiguity, which, as noted, complicates Levinas' presentation of the face, and its reception among scholars, is perhaps partly explained by the consonance between the Hebrew words for face (*panim*) and eye (*ayn*), which are etymologically cognate. The secondary literature on Levinas is replete with references to the correlation between the Hebrew words for 'face' (*panim*), 'eye' (*ayn*), and 'nudity' (*erva*), and Levinas' own deployment, translation, and adaptation, of these terms within his 'philosophical' thought. The overwhelming consensus among those scholars given to such philological exhumation is, indeed, that concord pertains between these two descriptive orders.

The sense denoted by the Hebrew word *panim* and that designated by the Levinasian *visage* is remarkably congruent. The Biblical *panim*, as Shmuel Trigano indicates, suggests "respect," "attention," and "caring" for the other human being' (Trigano, 2001, 289). The other person is thus the recipient of my regard and attention. Significantly, *panim* also carries placial and temporal connotations. As Edith Wyschogrod notes, in one of its forms *panim* conveys the sense 'in ancient times,' as 'in the sentence 'Of old (*lephanim*) hast thou laid the foundations of the earth' (Psalm 102:5)' (Wyschogrod, 2002, 197). *Panim* is therefore an adverb of time signifying 'anteriority.' As adverbial of place, *panim* means to be *positioned before* someone, or *to stand* in their presence. It denotes instantiation (the taking up of a stance) and also connotes the sense in which I am instantiated by the other person before whom I stand *panim el panim*, that is, face-to-face (*face-à-face*). Robert Gibbs proposes that the 'obligation' Levinas deduces from the ethical vis-à-vis 'emerges in the Hebrew word *lifné* which means literally "to the face," or "before" the face' (Gibbs, 1992, 165). Again, therefore, a strong 'correlation' between 'philosophical' and 'Hebraic' significations of meaning is asserted. The concept of 'nudity' (*nudité*), which Levinas employs to communicate the abstractness of the face and its destitution in the world, prompts Trigano to draw a parallel between it and the Biblical word *erva*. *Erv*a designates 'a being as it is exposed to exteriority,' 'exposed to everyone,' and 'handed over to things, contaminated, profaned.' The term, Trigano continues, 'indicates all relationships in which there is a non-redeemed exteriority,' the purpose

of ‘ “sanctification” – in Hebrew “separation”’ being to ‘hide the *erva*’ or nudity (Trigano, 2001, 290).

How do such correlations instruct the present critique? It is clear that Levinas’ presentation of the face is informed by Jewish categories of thought. Yet, this presentation, a presentation which ‘calls for another phenomenology’ (TAI 153), claims to deduce the imperative it locates in the face of the other person from the phenomenological explication of concrete empirical situations and encounters. Now, the fact that the face signifies as an injunction, and signifies, moreover, in the form of the Deuteronomic *אל תהרג*, or ‘Thou shalt not commit murder’ (TI 173), suggests, perhaps, that a certain interpretative liberty has been taken at the expense of phenomenological method. Quite whether this perversion of phenomenological method is, as Drabinski suggests, ‘authorized by the very phenomenology it perverts’ (Drabinski, 2001, 14), is questionable. For, is my being ‘ordered toward the face of the other’ (OBBE 11), an order that issues directly from the face, derailing the trajectory of the ego’s intentional regard, as Levinas states, or an injunction that has *come to reside* there as a product of the (axiological) accretions of Biblical culture? To be sure, I *come to recognize* the authority of the face, and acknowledge its destitution, but is this not due to the ‘establishment’ (*Stiftung*) in my perceptual field of a normative structure, a structure which functions there, in a regulatory fashion, to direct my experience? After all, in any act of attention, am I not, as Husserl suggests, ‘turned toward’ the object of my ‘perceiving,’ and do I not ‘seize upon,’ and ‘single out,’ the existent that confronts me against an ‘experiential background’ (*Id* §35)? In the case of the face (which apropos of Levinas can never be a case as such, for it is extrinsic to all genera), do I not choose to adhere to this normative ‘principle’ (ἀρχή) which has become sedimented in my field of action, conditioning the repertoire of my possible responses, and does the face not thus signify upon the basis of its heritability, against, that is, the background of the co-constitution and co-historization of values?

Clearly, the ability to select the ‘norm’ of the face, or reject its ingressions into my primordial sphere, is resolutely antithetical to Levinas’ teaching, particularly that of *Otherwise than Being* where the self is construed as a radical passivity. According to Levinas, I am taught my ‘inimitable singularity’ and confirmed in my ‘semelfactive uniqueness’ by the other person (OUJ 229). My individuality is therefore equated by Levinas with my being ‘unable to shirk’ my responsibilities (TI 245). I cannot take flight into the concept of an ‘ego,’ a ‘self,’ or an ‘I,’ because such genera invalidate my singularity by submerging me within the universality of general categories of being. This in-ability is effectuated through an act of proto-elective



selection, an act that befalls me and which I do not initiate. But, if the term 'teaching' (*enseignement*) is to designate the 'height' from which I am called into question by the Other, and 'teaching,' accordingly, is the 'very production' of exteriority, teaching the 'ethical' through the opening of a 'new dimension' (*TI* 171) – the face teaches transcendence – then is one not compelled to award such teaching a generative function and sense? Thereby, the face (the ethical signifier) teaches (gives itself to be heeded as injunctive) through the dimension of height (heritability). Does the notion of an ethical 'absolute' make sense outside the order of this heritability? And, dare one say it, is it not against the horizon(s) of heritable constitution that the sense of the face is disclosed, such horizons being themselves a catena of particular home-worlds and epochal consortia? Is this 'generational' dimension, as Ricoeur intimates, not an 'undeniable component' of the phenomena of 'injunction' and 'indebtedness' (Ricoeur, 1992, 353)?

On the one hand, and generally throughout his work, Levinas will oppose the sort of argumentation advanced here. However, he will also indicate, at times, that he is favourable to such thinking, as and when it suits his defence of Jewish particularity. For example, Levinas conceives his task as a philosopher to be to 'express in Greek those principles about which Greece knew nothing' (quite whether the 'principle' of the face was unknown to the 'Greeks,' as Levinas intimates, is debatable). 'Jewish peculiarity,' moreover, 'awaits its philosophy,' he adds (*AC* 200). Are we to presume, therefore, that this 'teaching' on the face is peculiarly Jewish, a peculiarity of which 'Judaism as event, history and Passion' is the 'breach and actual figure' (*AC* 199)? If the face, which conveys a 'message of difficult holiness,' speaks the language of 'Scripture,' as Levinas avers, then is it not reasonable to deduce that this 'language of the inaudible' (*EN* 199), which resonates at the heart of every speech act, signifies as such because of the 'difficult destiny' (the generative circumnavigations) of Jewish thought it accomplishes? Is, what Husserl terms the 'registry book of phenomenology' (*Id* §64), simply a derivative transcription, or transliteration, of the teachings of the Torah, given that all writing (and all language purportedly admits of a 'religious essence') 'commemorates' the 'Holy Scriptures' (*BV* xi)? Surely not. Husserl may prescribe for himself the 'norm of phenomenological reduction' (*Id* §64), but the imperative 'expressed' in the face of the other person is no less the result of a prescriptive act, and the fact that its injunction is held to normative is, similarly, the product of what one might call a generative *Sinngebung*. Has Levinas, perhaps, overlooked the fact that the thesis of the face is predicated upon what Husserl would

call, 'lines of dependency' ('connections of motivation'), namely by positing 'motivated' by prior positings within a constitutive series or framework (*Id II* §56)?

Levinas' arguably attempts to think through, to imagine, a (Jewish) 'peculiarity' beyond (Greek) 'universality' (AC 199), a peculiarity prior to the distinction, beloved of logicians, between the particular and the universal (a move which replicates, at the level of philosophy, the diachronic logic upon which Levinas' account of the subject-hostage is based). However, the philosophy of peculiarity to which Levinas dedicates himself, cannot claim to be normative and binding universally (which it ultimately endeavours to do (*RFA* 21)) without traducing the particularity of alternative phenomenologies of the face, phenomenologies which receive their instructive, or pedagogical, momentum from non-Jewish sources. To be sure, Levinas' references to 'Scripture,' and to the authority of the Torah, can, as Llewelyn notes, be taken to be figurations of the 'dissymmetrical relation in which I am more responsible than anyone for the other simply as other' (Llewelyn, 2000, 127). But, if 'language,' and the 'book that arises and is already read in language,' is, as Levinas believes it to be, 'phenomenology' itself, qua the '*staging* in which the abstract is made concrete' (*BV* xii-xiii), then ought one to read Levinas' writing on the face as merely one among many possible figurations of the face (revealing a situation of ethical polytheism, perhaps)? As such, Levinas' work is but one way to approach the phenomenological circumstances (*circonstances*) of the face; comparable to the fact that, for Husserl, the Cartesian (epistemological) route into phenomenology is but '*one of the ways* that has led to transcendental phenomenology' (*CM* §2 [48]; emphasis added) – one 'gate of entry' into phenomenological science, as it were (*Crisis* §71) – other entry routes being via psychology and the life-world. While I agree with Bernasconi that 'Levinas is not preaching,' but, as it were, trying to 'account for' the 'possibility' of ethicality (Bernasconi, 2002, 235). The 'possibility' Levinas accounts for is a possibility which he feels is actualized in the 'spiritual originality' of Judaism (AC 198), a paradoxical particularism, in which the peculiarity of Judaism's 'exceptional' teaching involves a movement of self distancing, and an internal *nisus* to disperse itself, that is, to disseminate the *σπορά* of Jewish wisdom among the 'Nations' and to let it take root there. An instance of enrootedness (*enracinement*) Levinas is not so keen to extirpate, unlike the religions of the sacred (*le sacré*) whose teachings he deplures.



## § 5. Pre-philosophical experience

The face Levinas' details is not occluded (how could it be when it is devoid of surface) but is rather *that which sees*. Not so much the power, or entelechy, of sight, for Levinas does not subscribe to the credo of hylomorphism, as the *invisibility of the visible*, permeating and suffusing 'form' (where form (μορφή) once might have articulated matter (ὕλη)) yet disdaining recourse to the shelter it provides, and thus remaining forever 'homeless' and 'naked' in the 'concreteness of the world' (MS 53).<sup>16</sup> Such invisibility of the visible is concomitant with the fullness of emptiness, and the existence of nothingness, that define the ilyaity of brute being. In point of fact, a plausible interpretation of the face might be proffered by considering it to be the 'excluded middle' (*tiers exclu*) of invisibility and visibility.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, this would be consistent with its enigmatical nature (does the face admit of φύσις though, when it is putatively non-substantial and the very other of essence?) and would further explain the 'blinking light' that marks its entry into the 'visual' order.

In its alternance, or scintillation (*scintillation*), the face calls attention to the jarring of the onto-phenomenological and the ethical registers and indicates, perhaps, that it is their coruscation that is primary. Might this not be another way of understanding Levinas when he claims that the legitimacy of his project stands or falls with 'the possibility of vibrating with a meaning' (EP 67) that cannot be ordered according to the metre of presence? It may be, of course, that 'signification' is, *contra* Levinas, 'silhouetted' against a context (EP 69). The context in question is not the order interrupted by the face, so much as the inter-space between the 'ethical' and the 'onto-phenomenological' domains as Levinas presents them, against which the face signifies as a face: a veritable *Zwischenland* between the 'ethical' (Levinas), the 'phenomenological' (Husserl), and the 'ontological' (Heidegger). I maintain, therefore, that the face, in its lambency, signifies precisely as the alternance of the

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<sup>16</sup> Levinas censures Heidegger for his lack of sensitivity to the factual 'needs' of Dasein. Dasein requires housing (shelter) and sustenance (Food and drink) etc. Yet Levinas' own account of the 'essential' homelessness of the 'face' might appear to be similarly abstracted from the demands of 'concrete' life. However, Levinas account of the face ensures that at the level of the ethical *fouilles* he practices (comparable, although structurally more 'rudimentary,' than the fundamental ontology of Heidegger) the 'homelessness' that defines the face in relation to the 'world' obligates one to minister to the Other in her need beyond the empirical destitution she may suffer. Empirical deprivation is not the condition of the face, rather the poverty of the face summons *in the midst* of the empirical as such.

<sup>17</sup> For an extended treatment of the 'middle voice,' see Llewelyn *The Middle Voice of Ecological Concern*. Derrida advances a similar conclusion, conferring that the 'phenomenon' of the face 'is a certain nonphenomenon, its presence (is) a certain absence. Not pure and simple absence, for then logic could make its claim, but a *certain absence*' (Derrida, 1978, 91; emphasis added).

‘ethical’ and the ‘phenomenological.’ It is their interfluence. A situation of decussion to which we will return in the conclusion to this study.

The somewhat questionable assertion that the enigma of the face is phainaesth-ethical, rather than purely ethical, may now be substantiated more convincingly. For the face is *that which shines forth the most* (ἐκφανεστάτον), because it is simultaneously that which brings the ‘subject’ to light as a ‘creature,’ and that which is itself brought to light as axiologically primordial against the horizon of socially constituted, heritable being. The face *shines forth from itself* (as indicated, it is its own light source), manifesting itself καθ’ αὐτό, and assigns me my ontological station; where such assignation resounds with the archaic sense of marking out, so that it is the Other who marks out the perimeters of my psychical, or rather, pneumatological space. Moreover, the face ‘shines forth,’ Levinas argues, in and through the ‘poverty and ‘hunger’ of the other person (PV 139). I would argue, therefore, that it is the configuration of the ontico-phenomenal and the ethical that engenders the figure of the face, a configuration in which the ‘ontological’ does not ‘turn into’ the ‘ethical,’ as Levinas himself confers (NGTT 127), but rather striates, and is in turn striated by the ethical, akin to the way in which the ‘trace’ of the Other, according to Levinas, striates, ‘with its furrows,’ the ‘clarity of the ostensible’ (OBBE 100).

The liaison between Levinas’ self-styled ‘philosophical’ and ‘Talmudic’ texts is bald where discussion of the face is concerned. One could claim, for example, that the face Levinas permits to manifest itself in his ‘work,’ is a νόθος, that is, the bastard child of an Athenian (Greek) father and a ‘foreign’ (Jewish) mother (much in the way that the figure of the ‘orphan’ (*orphelin(e)χyatom*) describes the destitution of the Other). This suggestion would appear to be in keeping with Levinas’ own designation of his work as a kind of ‘scepticism,’ a ‘*bastard child* of the Spirit’ returning to the ‘paternal house’ of philosophy in the aftermath of the ‘refutations’ that cast it away (OBBE 192n.18; emphasis mine); a paternal house that more and more resembles the *yeshiva*, or Jewish house of study, than the Ακαδημία. Arguably, the difficult frisson that prevails between the ‘Talmudic’ and the ‘philosophical’ orders of enquiry reflects the vacillation one encounters in the face between the phenomenal and the enigmatical, phenomenality and enigmaticity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> That this is so is no doubt further compounded by the incorrect translation of ‘legitimate child’ (*enfant légitime*) as ‘illegitimate child’ in the English language translation of *Otherwise than Being*. See, for example, (OBBE 7, 182, 192n.18) for at least three examples of this error.



Levinas arraigns Husserl for his lack of attention to the facticity of human existence, commenting that 'the ink of the world stains the fingers that put this world between parentheses' (NI 148). The phenomenological reduction, Levinas insists, is itself the product of the 'world' from whence it issues and the philosopher 'must return to language' from the vaunted heights of theory 'to convey, even if betraying them, the pure and unutterable' (NI 148). These sentiments set the basic methodological agenda for *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. However, the criticism Levinas inveighs against Husserl here can be readily applied to his own thought. For not only does Husserl, *contra* Levinas, provide detailed explications of the constitution of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) and the home-world (*Heimwelt*), locating the genesis of rational thought within an intersubjective and intercultural community, but Levinas himself fails to account phenomenologically for the cultural and religious inheritance that subtends his properly philosophical thought. He willingly concedes that prephilosophical experiences undergird philosophical writing (MBCJ 5); and, indeed, that 'every philosophical thought rests on pre-philosophical experiences' (EI 24), experiences, what is more, that cannot be transposed fully, and finally, into the site of the philosophical λόγος, since philosophy is ultimately inadequate to the ethical *déstructure* deduced from concrete empirical situations, Levinas believes. Yet, in presuming the content of such experiences (rather than their structuration) to be largely 'autobiographical,' Levinas deprives phenomenology of a gainful field of research. Is this, perhaps, because Levinas positions his own *scientia regulatrix* against the selfsame psychologism, and psychologicistic tendencies of thought, to which Husserl had opposed his own phenomenology (QA 82)? The 'ontological language' utilized in *Totality and Infinity*, and subsequently revised in *Otherwise than Being*, is, after all, deployed 'in order to exclude the purely psychological significance of the proposed analyses' presented in those works (S 295). Moral consciousness is subsequently 'not a modality of psychological consciousness, but its *condition*,' Levinas will insist (S 293).

How are we to treat the admission, therefore, that the 'phenomenological' studies to be found in *Existence and Existents*, were 'written down for the most part in captivity' (EE 15)? Is one to take such 'captivity' as a figure for the subject's being held 'hostage' by the Other, that is, as a merely formal notion? Again, what are we to make of Levinas' statement from the essay 'Signature' (1976), that the 'disparate inventory' (*inventaire disparate*) into which the events and achievements of his life are ordered, 'is dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror [*elle est dominée par le presentiment et le souvenir de l'horreur nazie*]' (SI 291; SIG

406)? How one assesses the implications and compass exerted by such 'domination' is unclear, particularly given the juxtaposition of the aforementioned 'confession' with the following comments on phenomenological method, which appear in the proceeding paragraph of the same piece. The 'unsuspected horizons' within which the 'real is apprehended,' Levinas avers, beginning with the 'body' and the 'sedimentation' of a history, 'transcendentally *condition*' philosophical activity (S 292). Does a term like 'persecution' (*persécution*), then, a term employed in Levinas' later work to dispel all traces of the actional from his account of the ethical subject, not, by default, owe its prominent place in Levinas' 'philosophy' to the 'pre-philosophical' experiences of persecution he himself underwent, and witnessed among others (including his close and immediate family), during the War, not to mention the prosecutions of memory that would force him to relive those experiences *as* trauma? The genesis of the 'concept' is particular, one might say, even if its application is (purportedly) universal. Indeed, when Levinas intimates, in *Otherwise than Being*, that it is 'as though' (*comme si*) 'I' were responsible for the Other's 'mortality' and 'guilty for surviving [*coupable de survivre*]' (OBBE 91; AE 145), does he not meld the psycho-biographical and the philosophical to the point of indistinction? Furthermore, the itinerary, whose stages Levinas traces in *Otherwise than Being*, is, he declares, '*not completely disengaged* from pre-philosophical experiences,' an alliance philosophy must 'risk' if it is to remain true to its course, he adds (OBBE 20; emphasis added). Is *Otherwise than Being* not perhaps, in a curious and yet not entirely implausible way, what one might call a philosophical biocidy, therefore, a justification to continue living after the catastrophe?

Ought (a) philosophy to neglect to explore the environs of its own inception, one may ask? No doubt, the philosopher often fails to address these questions adequately, because the 'empirical' ego personality is excluded from the field of phenomenological consideration. It may be, therefore, that the 'origin' (ἀρχή) is not so much deposed (Levinas) as, rather, suppressed. Philosophy does not know quite what to do with the psychism, it seems. Perhaps a more honest interrogation of what one might call, the *Selbstwelt*, ought to accompany philosophical enquiry in some guise. Certainly, the standing of this 'ought' is contentious, and rightfully so. Philosophy would be quickly reduced to the level of some kind of diarial art, were it to trade too liberally in the affairs of the personal. Yet the personal is clearly a problem for the phenomenologist. For, even if one succeeds in holding in abeyance what one takes to be the flotsam of one's psychical life, such realia cannot be rendered totally inert, and continue to inform the character of the given as it presents



itself to reflection. Of course, the ‘meaning’ (*sens*) of a philosopher’s thought cannot, as Levinas states, be reduced solely to the ‘coherence – or incoherence – of the signifiers that bear it,’ nor to the ‘psychological genesis’ of the signifiers themselves (*JW* 69). However, while we might agree with Levinas that this meaning must be ‘listened to without looking down to scrutinize’ its ‘traces,’ ‘check’ its ‘logic’ or ‘invent a psychology’ to account for it, can we really approve of his claim that philosophical ‘teaching’ precedes, absolutely, the contingency of the philosopher’s temperament and, moreover, that it ‘commands the psychological particularities’ of the philosopher (*JW* 69)? Surely philosophy’s movement towards the concrete (*vers le concret*) entails that it pay closer attention to its psychological provenance, rather than dismissing the contingencies of the personal (not to mention the role of the unconscious) as unnecessary impediments to philosophical thought. One may then, with William Richardson, legitimately enquire as to whether Levinas provides us with ‘a place to talk about unconscious influences in his protoethics’ (Richardson, 1995, 125), and whether the insights of psychoanalytic practice are not sidelined by Levinas in a thoroughly truculent and decidedly un-phenomenological way.<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger admonishes Husserl for suspending the question of the Being of entities. In his pursuit of the originary, Heidegger endeavours to determine the origin of the *Grundbegriffe* that guide and instruct the ways in which the ‘meaning’ of Being has been disclosed within the philosophical ‘tradition.’ (*BT* §6 [22]) In order to perform the *Destruktion* of that tradition – a destructive move in which Heidegger’s philosophical programme is initiated – Heidegger interrogates the *Geburtsbriefes* of the ontological concepts in which the *Seinsfrage* has been formulated. The ‘language’ to which the philosopher must return is always already encoded with the significations of culture. Language possesses its own unique heritage and is a product of historical lines of transmission, the product of co-historization. Who better than Heidegger has taught us this? Because Levinas believes that pre-dictive ‘saying’ subtends the ‘said’ of thematisation (and, furthermore, civilization) and because ethics, qua πρόκληση

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<sup>19</sup> Levinas’ basic position with regard to ‘psychoanalysis’ changes little throughout his career. In ‘The Ego and The Totality’ (1954) he writes: ‘psychoanalysis casts a basic suspicion on the most unimpeachable testimony of self-consciousness. That the clear and distinct consciousness of what was formerly called a psychological fact is now taken to be only the symbolism for a reality that is totally inaccessible to itself, and that it expresses a social reality or a historical influence totally distinct from its own intention, is what voids the very return of the *cogito*’ (*ET* 34). Needless to say, simply because the ‘evidence’ of the *cogito* is challenged by the theory of the ‘unconscious’ does not mean that the latter should be viewed with disdain or rejected unfairly. Levinas, after all, will speak of the ‘immemorial,’ and will seek to describe a time on the ‘hither side’ of the ego and its recuperative acts. Quite how one can discriminate phenomenologically between the psychoanalytical ‘unconscious’ and the proto-ethical ‘immemorial’ is a moot point, of course. Might they not also, like *ilyaity* and *illeity*, be ‘crossed to the point of confusion,’ one may wonder?

φιλοσοφία, purports to describe the proto-ethical superstructures that underlie the science of ethics, with its various norms and precepts vying to regulate human comportment, he does not consider the cultural and religious momentum behind his own distinctly ethical reductions.

Is Levinas not guilty of allowing the transmissions of tradition to infect the field of (pure) ethics he expounds? Has Levinas' presentation of the face-to-face relation (Levinas' figuration of the 'face') not, through the transit of tradition, delivered itself over to the comfort of self-evidence without fully excavating the sources (*Quellen*) from which it is brought forth? Indeed, might the field of 'pure' ethics not itself benefit from a process of mundification – a cleansing of those concepts that delineate the range of this field and circumscribe, *a priori*, the *extensio* of ethical space<sup>20</sup> – a purification of sense commensurable with the 'purification' of 'descriptive-psychological' terms, such as 'consciousness,' 'experience,' and 'content,' which, Husserl believes, is paramount in order that the 'science' of phenomenology become 'purely phenomenological' (*LU* II.5 §5)? How radical is the dis-structure (*déstructure*) of the face-to-face if the de-structuration it effects fails to break through the topsoil of acculturation and fails to declare its dogmatic origins? Is the destructuration Levinas oversees (assuredly modelled on the Heideggerian *Destruktion*), a de-structuration, what is more, that sanctions the 'destruction of the phenomenology of appearance and knowledge' (*TAI* 153), thorough enough to achieve its aim of reconstructing the tradition, supposedly de-constructed by Heidegger, according to the aegis of the face? It would appear that a certain 'radical suspicion' is demanded here (Heidegger, 1998, 26), suspicion, that is, regarding the context of concepts and formulations that arise from the preconceptions to which Levinas submits himself.

To be sure, the exergues that preface *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, correct any thought that would attempt to dissociate Levinas' philosophy from the factual realities of human life and death. Levinas' dedication of that work to 'the six million assassinated' during the Nazi Holocaust, and furthermore, to all 'victims of the same hatred of the other man,' the same 'anti-semitism,' as he terms it, confirms the principal orientation of his thinking to be unequivocally humanistic (Levinas' philosophy is a humanism of the other human being). As Bernhard

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<sup>20</sup> In the essay 'Assimilation and Culture,' Levinas adverts to the 'conception of concepts whose roots go right to the depths of the Jewish soul' (*AC* 201). One must accept, I think, that Levinas' revaluation of philosophical terms is likewise 'rooted' in the teachings of Judaism. This is unproblematic. What is problematic is that the provocation of the face, a face which signifies καθ' αὐτό, signifies as such according to these teachings and thus compromises the phenomenological tenor of Levinas' project.



Waldenfels observes, the ‘polar air of violent death penetrates’ *Otherwise than Being* (Waldenfels, 2002, 73). The dedicatees of this ‘work’ are not simply those whose faces have been effaced in heinous acts of murder and torture. The work is itself proleptic, its exergual dedications are put to work for all those who may fall foul of similar acts of genocide (one thinks of Bosnia and Rwanda, for example). Responsibility extends beyond the margins of the ‘text’ and outside the parallelepiped within which it is framed. Indeed, responsibility extends beyond the context of ‘my’ life. As such, it is truly fecund.

Yet the poignancy of these remarks, and the obvious legitimacy of Levinas’ philosophical itinerary, ought not to distract critical attention from its task of probing the margins of Levinas’ thought and questioning the authority of the deductions he implements. Confronted by the ‘tradition’ it ‘challenges’ or ‘claims for itself,’ Levinas’ thought, as Janicaud adverts, ‘must also answer for its own coherence’ (Janicaud, 2000, 39). The conflux of ‘Talmudic’ and ‘philosophical’ thought is, in itself, not sufficient grounds for vexation. However, Levinas’ ‘phenomenology of the noumenon’ (FC 21) is remiss to the extent that it *does not scrutinize the preconditions of its own natality*. To be sure, a philosopher ought not to be assailed for what he or she did not say. Clearly, there are limits to the remit of any project. One should not, for example, censure Heidegger for the recalcitrance of his thought to (ontically) ‘ethical’ issues (where it is, of course, permissible to question the actions of Heidegger the ‘man’). Thinkers as diverse as Frederick Olafson, Jean-Luc Nancy, David Wood and Graham Parkes have explored the theme of an originary ethos (ἦθος) in Heidegger and underscored its centrality within his philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, one might argue, Levinas ought not to be castigated for omitting to attend to the particular home-worlds from which his thought is sourced. However, a thought that would think through the upsurge of that which signifies καθ’ αὐτό, a thought, moreover, which recognizes an injunction in the ‘face’ of ‘him’ who signifies as such, and yet restricts the range of who or what expresses as a face, is a thought sourced somewhere, despite Levinas’ claim to the contrary, that the face stems precisely from ‘elsewhere’ (*ailleurs*). The ‘true life of spirit’ may be ‘elsewhere’ (USFG 2), but the face can only signify as such, and remain identical with itself, in contradistinction to

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Frederick Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. R. Richardson and A. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Graham Parkes, ‘Thoughts on the Way: *Being and Time* via Lao-Chuang’ in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987); Michel Haar, *Heidegger and the Essence of Man*, trans. William McNeill (Albany, SUNY Press, 1993).

that against which it signifies, if it is designated to be of axiological primacy. Our task is thus to interrogate the explicata Levinas deploys to characterize the face, and to further clarify the hermeneutical framework (ἐρμηνεύειν) to which he appeals, and within which his thought unfolds; a task that warrants the drawing up of a 'transcendental inventory' (MS 56) in order to account for the sources from which this lore of proto-ethical jurisprudence derives its authority.

The infrastructure of Levinas' thought is complex, although its JewχGreek heredity cannot be denied. Rather than extenuating Levinas' insights this admission reinforces the efficacy of his arguments for the (a)priority of the face-to-face relation.<sup>22</sup> Instead of merely deriding or applauding Levinas' thought (depending upon where one's philosophical loyalties lie) as a 'Jewish phenomenology' or a phenomenology of Jewish experience – an affront to Levinas' own conceptualization of his project – it is more germane, I believe, to categorize his philosophy as a thinking of the inaugural. A thinking of the inaugural that is both an enactment, or inauguration, of a new way of practising phenomenology (and putting phenomenology to work), and a thought that would think itself back (a radical *Nachdenken*) to the moment of its interruption from the 'outside;' a thinking of the preliminary, therefore, outside the origin, or ἀρχή, of egoic consciousness. A thought, one might also designate by the word palaeontology (for it probes 'unsuspected horizons' and 'forgotten experiences' overlooked by Husserlian phenomenology (TI 28)), were this term not already deployed by the science of the same name.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps, a remnant of augury can still be found at the heart of this inaugural thought – a most 'sober' (*dégrisé*) thought that prides itself upon its having 'sobered up from the ecstasy of intentionality' (GP 140) – an augurship, or form of divination, given to reading 'traces' of the divine (θεῖον) into the 'face' of the human. Levinas' thought, at once a phenomenology of the face (albeit a phenomenology of the face compromised by its own omissions) and an explication of creaturality (*créaturalité*), does institute the opening of a new dimension, as Levinas himself maintains, however this dimension, so apt for phenomenological excavation, is the dimension of heritability and transmission (literally tradition), which is not

<sup>22</sup> 'My' proximity to the neighbour, a modality of distance irreducible to the 'contiguity' Levinas believes to characterize the relationship between 'things,' is an 'assigination' older than the 'a priori' and 'prior' to any act that would 'effect it' (OBBE 101).

<sup>23</sup> Critchley's remarks are instructive here and suggest that such a designation (as broached above) is far from pleonastic. Critchley notes that Levinas' language 'forms a series of *palaeonymic* displacements' where 'the ancient words of the tradition are repeated and in that repetition semantically transformed' (Critchley, 1996, 43).

posterior to the ethical as Levinas conceives it, but contemporaneous and coterminous with it. In this sense, phenomenology is, as Derrida intimates, 'respect itself,' that is to say, it is 'the *development and becoming-language* of respect itself' (Derrida, 1978, 121; emphasis added).

It might appear somewhat anachronous (given the peculiar 'logic' of diachrony and the *posteriorité de l'antérieur*) to confer the status of contemporaneity upon that which precedes sequential and synchronic time and thus precedes the order of comparability. Yet the ethical dis-structure (*déstructure*) – a *déstructure* because it 'no longer forms a structure with consciousness' (NGTT 127) – is evidenced in the disparate phenomena of 'fecundity' (*fécondité*), 'filiality' (*filialité*), 'teaching' (*enseignement*), 'persecution' (*persécution*), and 'creation' (*création*), all of which are generative in determination. Therefore, it is not the case that the fundamentals of Levinas' thought are irremissibly flawed, nor found lacking in their basic premises, rather the decidedly nuanced account of ethicality Levinas presents *presupposes* the very phenomena of which he writes. The ethical *déstructure* is primary, but the form in which Levinas articulates it, is not. Form and face remain disjunct, as Levinas contends (yet they are interlaced in their disunity), but the nature of this disjunction is perhaps more complex than even Levinas is willing to admit.<sup>24</sup>

If philosophy consists, as Plato declares, in not μῦθόν τινα διηγέισθαι (*Sophist* 242c), that is, as Heidegger reminds us, in 'not telling a story' (BT 6), then surely Levinas is guilty of a lapse of philosophical vigilance. Levinas' account of the face is just a little too *fabulous* to satisfy the demands of phenomenological explication, even if phenomenology assumes a form distinct from the rigorous science (*strenghe Wissenschaft*) commissioned by Husserl. Can 'manifestation καθ' αὐτό' really consist in a being 'telling itself' to us independently of 'every position we would have taken in its regard' (TI 65)? In Levinas' defence, one might argue that it is precisely the fillip of factual life, in its undeniable concretion, which excites the analyses he undertakes. It is thus because Levinas believes the 'Western' philosophical tradition to be itself decisively 'storied' (and the thinking of Being it assays to deaden the sensation for the concretion of the face beneath the mirabilia of

<sup>24</sup> Derrida is acutely aware of the problematic raised here. In 'En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici,' he will speak of the 'tissue' of Levinas' 'text' that interlaces both 'texture and atexture without uniting them.' The Other comes to 'tear' the 'continuum' of this tissue which still tends to 'sew itself back up again' and 'resume its tears.' One might argue, therefore, that the ethical *déstructure* requires 'de-stricturation.' See op. cit., translated as, 'At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am' by Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, (eds.) Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (London: The Athlone Press, 1991, 26).

the phainæsthetic) that his thought is conducted in the register of the hyperbolic and the superlative. Does philosophy (φιλοσοφία) not, in fact, attain its ‘superlative,’ as Levinas contends, as the ‘incessant restlessness’ (OBBE 82) of the ethical subject; an agitation which cannot be wrested from its course, nor come to rest (*repos*) securely, in the site of the philosophical logos (λόγος)? This may be the case. However, the analysis of the face Levinas provides still appears, it seems, to fall back upon what Heidegger would call the ‘allurements’ (*Verlockungen*) of the ways in which that which faces, and what may signify as a face, have been ‘ordinarily understood’ (BT §74 [387]), understood, that is, within a predominantly humanocentric philosophical (and theological) tradition. Again, it may be, as Levinas argues, that the ‘appearing’ of the ‘phenomenon is *already a discourse*’ (OBBE 104; emphasis added). Phenomenology, as such, is the identification – or proclamation – of the same, across a multitude of *Abschattungen*, within an economy of immanence. But, and according to the selfsame line of reasoning advanced above, does it not also follow that the manifestation of the face, καθ’ αὐτό, is itself *already a fable*? Can the λόγος to which Levinas adheres (despite his attempts to repeatedly efface it (OBBE 20)) extricate itself from the myth (μῦθος) of its own making? Is myth (μῦθος) not the exordium of the λόγος (rationality) that would, according to legend (that is, according to a certain venerable tradition extending from Aristotle, through Hegel and Husserl, to Levinas) bring about its demise? And furthermore, does μῦθος not survive into the θεωρία that would deign to supersede it (and in Levinas’ case to ‘demythologize’ it (TS 53)), such that the history of Western philosophy might attest unwittingly to the perdurance of μῦθος and the continuing significance of wonderment (θαυμάζειν) purportedly suppressed along with it?<sup>25</sup>

Of course, it may be, as Husserl reminds us, that ‘phantasy’ (*Phantasie*), or what we might term more broadly, imagination, is central to any phenomenological undertaking.<sup>26</sup> Thus, ‘feigning,’ or ‘*Fiktion*,’ as Husserl insists, ‘*makes up the vital element of phenomenology as of every other eidetic science*,’ so much so that, ‘feigning is the source from which the cognition of “eternal truths” is fed’ (Id §70). Leaving aside the ‘eternization’ broached by Husserl here (a notion one might replace with that of transhistoricity), are we not led to conclude, perhaps, that a certain bardic imperative is inscribed at the heart of phenomenological endeavour? Might phenomenology not precisely involve the *telling of tales*, a telling and retelling of the

<sup>25</sup> It is to such an ‘attestation’ that we turn in part three of this work.

<sup>26</sup> In *Time and the Other*, does Levinas not himself ask us to ‘imagine all things, beings and persons, returning to nothingness’ so as to exhibit the *il y a* in its ‘indeterminacy’ (TO 46)?

*Sachen Selbst*, where the 'things' concerned might 'teach' one how to regard (*regarder*) them and not to simply view them circumspectly with an eye to their use (*Being and Time*), or to the pleasure (*plaisir*) they may or may not induce in their human claimants (*Totality and Infinity*)? Indeed, one might learn from the 'things themselves' that one's 'place in the sun' (*place au soleil*) is a place shared by many whose emergence into the 'clearing' (*die Lichtung*) has been denied them, or whose faces have been defaced (*devisagé*), because they are deemed to be either wordless (*sans parole*) or worldless (*sans monde*).

One can then, in response to the question Levinas ventures in the preface to the first edition of *Totality and Infinity*, never 'undo the inevitable dogmatism that gathers up and gauges an exposition in pursuit of its theme' (*TI* 29).<sup>27</sup> However, one is required to efface the presentation in which those themes are exposed, and expose them recurrently to their ethical source. The body of the 'text' is simply another layer of the derma (behind which one is *mal dans sa peau*) that must be turned toward the Other and exposed to the outrage of the 'face,' an outrage that inverts the order of the 'near-sphere' (*Nahsphäre*) centred upon the pure Ego (*reines Ich*). The face Levinas deduces serves as a phenomenological *Leitfaden*, or clue, to a face that resists the complicity of discourse (even a discourse as seemingly vigilant as Levinas' (*OBBE* 20)). Thus, it will prove requisite to efface the face in its Levinasian configuration (and by all accounts any discourse on the face is a configuration, namely a conjunction or assembly of face and form) in order to permit the 'infinite,' in its considerable effulgence, an 'infinite' whose positive determination has yet to be fixed, to highlight the limitations of the form(at) in which it is exhibited.

The policy of effacement adverted to here is thus raised to the level of a methodological procedure. Levinas himself intimates as much, of course, throughout his career, and nowhere more explicitly than in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Levinas does not provide the authoritative account of the face, any more than *Being and Time*, which culminates in the posing of a series of questions, provides the authoritative answer to the question of Being. Just as *Being and Time* is exergual, that is, it performs its work outside the determinate space delimited by the borders of its covers (the reader is urged to take up the task of philosophy and not to simply assimilate the teachings of the tradition unquestioningly – a tradition in which *Being and Time* itself features), so too does Levinas' 'philosophy' incite its readers to

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<sup>27</sup> After all, as Levinas insists, the beyond being does *not* allow itself to be 'walled up in the conditions of its own enunciation' (*OBBE* 156). In point of fact, 'transcendence owes it to itself to interrupt its own demonstration' (*GP* 148).



perform, or practise, the 'reductions' it proposes. As such, Levinas' philosophy is less a method (although it is, as we have seen, bound by stringent *regulae*) than a way, or *óδος*, through which to approach the face. Nonetheless, Levinas himself does remain committed to certain rudimentary principles from which he repeatedly takes his conceptual bearings. These principles govern the composition of his thought and manage the staging of the face-to-face relation he details. The 'tableau' of the face-to-face relation is, therefore, set forth in consonance with these principles. As our analysis proceeds it will prove necessary to interrogate this ideational montage further. Before an examination of the 'orientation' of Levinas' thought can be undertaken, the orientation of thought, and the vectors of ethical space, must be established.



## 2. ORIENTATION

### § 6. *The dimensions of responsibility*

The vectors of the face-to-face relation are well known, although prone to serious misunderstanding. It appears customary to simply rehearse Levinas' pronouncements as if, stated with complete assurance and pellucidity, they required no further justification. Levinas' reception and subsequent critique of the thought of Martin Buber, for example, meets with general approval within the secondary literature on Levinas, as if the disputations between these two thinkers, principally concerning the 'sphere of the between' (*Zwischenmenschliche*), had been settled. In truth, Buber's work is often depreciated by scholars keen to elide those aspects of his thought which undermine the cogency of Levinas' critiques of him. Correspondingly, there are, as we shall see, areas of significant congruity between the two thinkers such that a robust comparative study of Levinas and Buber would be entirely warranted. Such disputations do, however, alert us to the governing problematic in both thinker's work, namely that of orientation.

The 'dimension' of ethics (also described by Levinas as the 'field sketched out by the paradox of an infinite in relation' (WE 200)) opens in the 'sensible appearance' of the face (TI 198). This opening – less an aperture exposing a subjacent base than a breaching of the panopticon of vision – delineates 'a distance in depth' (TI 39), a 'depth' (*profondeur*) which punctuates the horizontal structure of perceptual experience – it infringes upon the perceptual fringe – because it recedes beyond the horizons of consciousness and the relations of laterality accommodated by it. Furthermore, Levinas cautions, it is preferable not to describe 'the face as an opening,' for this would be to render it 'relative to an environing plenitude' (OF 10). Contrary to the recession that characterises the elemental (*l'élément*), and the abyssal depths into which the existent can descend – a 'descent toward the ever more profound abyss' of the *il y a* (TI 93) – the profundity opened in the face of the other person recedes *ad infinitum*. Rather than dissolving the identity of the ego it commands (the ego's involution in the elemental blurs the boundaries of its selfhood, Levinas argues) the depth opened in the face singularizes the subject. The subject is singularized precisely as the one who responds to the invocation of the Other, and it achieves its 'unicity qua I' by virtue of its 'position before the other as a face' (TI

214). The depth Levinas charts is eventmental (it is an *événement*), therefore, marking the incessant withdrawal of the Other from the prearticulated structures of experience. This withdrawal engenders the space within which the ethical relation is dramatized. Again, the 'depth' conferred here differs from the 'depth,' or perspective, displayed by physical objects and likewise by that depth which sets the phenomenon (φαινόμενον) against the internal horizons of its innumerable *Abschattungen*, or profiles. For although, as Levinas argues, the 'perception of a thing is an infinite process,' our accession to the thing being 'through the infinite aspects it presents' to us (*WED* 65), the 'infinite' with which we are confronted here is that of a 'horizon' against which disclosure is possible. The infinity appertinent to perceptual acts opens a space within which empty intuitions are capable of fulfilment. However, the infinity – the *manière d'être*, or effectuation, of infinity (*TI* 26) – revealed in the face of the Other, and produced as the 'positing of its idea in me' (*TI* 26), overflows the horizons of possibility appropriate to perceptual acts by virtue of its essential non-adequation.

The 'depth' (*profondeur*) in which the dimension of ethics unfolds is unfathomable to the extent that it cannot be adequately appraised by cognition. Yet, the limit it imposes upon thought simultaneously inhibits and obligates the existent. The existent, qua responsible subject, is produced in the encounter with the Other (a production rethought as the second hypostasis of the existent in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*). The Levinasian subject is individuated by the Other, such that the exigency of the Other's supplication attests at once to the subject's convocation (it is called together and unified as such) and its vocation as 'one' who is for-the-other. The identity of the existent is thus deepened and drawn out, in unison with the with-drawal of the Other, and its *métier* as 'creature' confirmed (where in *Existence and Existents* hypostasis is very much an affirmation, or *signing on* to Being, defined by the instantiation of the ego). This *métier*, one might argue, metes out and establishes the parameters for the subject's being, ex-spatiating it according to the dicta of ethicality and interrupting the 'imperialism' of the conatus in its *espace vital* (*PII* 55). The living space (*Lebensraum*) of nutrimental existence is reoriented in the encounter with the face. The trophic, as Levinas would have it, is exceeded in the encounter with the face, and the reign of the element (*l'élément*) suspended.

Ethical space is marked by a curious admixture of 'depth' and 'height.' The intersection of these two vectors opens what Levinas describes as 'the very dimension of elevation' (TH 17). Depth is troped as 'humility' because the Other is needful and summons my response (lest one forget that seasoned troupe of Levinasian players, the 'widow' (*veuve*), the 'orphan' (*orphelin(e)*), and the 'stranger' (*étranger*), all of whom petition my assistance<sup>1</sup>), yet it converts into 'height' because I am 'under an obligation' (ET 41) to respond to the other person who faces me. The straightforwardness (*droiture*) of the face-to-face is, therefore, inclined vertically and surmounts the lateral dimension in which objects and things are positioned alongside one another in relations of commensurability and compossibility. The 'stranger,' the 'orphan,' and the 'widow' (all metonyms for the 'neighbour' (*prochain(e)*) who faces me, i.e., the Other *in situ*, as it were) venture their appeal to me from 'on high' and from 'below.'<sup>2</sup> The binary pair 'above-below,' which Levinas characterizes as an 'above-below disposition' (TI 297), or ethical *Stimmung*, once again accentuating the break with the phenomenological attitude, establishes the coordinates of ethical space, and this collocation of terms, indicated by the hyphen that conjoins them, attests to the disruption of normal spatial transaction.

Where the phenomenological reduction, as previously noted, brings space to light as a product of kinaesthesia and the corporeity of the lived-body (where the expatiation of the lived body (*Leib*) literally ex-spatiates the environment (*Umwelt*) in which it perambulates (Husserl, 1981, 246)), the ethical reduction Levinas performs uncovers a 'curved space' anterior to the sphere of oneness (*Eigenheitssphäre*) from which the ego holds sway (*walten*) in its immediate environment. 'Curved,' 'asymmetrical' space, Levinas insists, subtends rectilinear, planiform space – the *räumliche Ausdehnung* of geometry. For geometrization is a

<sup>1</sup> Although Levinas will invoke such 'figures' of alterity, it is the 'stranger,' according to Robert Bernasconi, that 'creates the distance or "separation" that introduces the ethical' (Bernasconi, 2000, 63). And, indeed, Levinas does intimate that the 'strangeness of the Other' is 'accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity,' that is, 'as ethics' (TI 43).

<sup>2</sup> As Adam Newton notes, the approach of the Other 'from on high' mimics the *mi-elyon* of the Biblical 'God.' Similarly the Levinasian triumvirate of the 'stranger,' the 'orphaned,' and the 'widowed,' have clear antecedents in the Torah's '*ger*,' '*yatom*,' and '*v'almanah*.' It is clearly debatable as to what extent Levinas' humanism of the other human being (a universalism of 'particularity') replicates the kind of exclusivism that often attends the Judaic designation of the 'neighbour,' especially in its Halakhic form. All manner of regulatory edicts govern the treatment of one's 'neighbour,' and delimit, with staggering precision, just who and who is not to be accorded this most privileged of epithets. See (Newton, 2001, 15).

product of mathesis and first philosophy (*philosophie première*), in its Levinasian determination, describes the ethical dis-structure (*déstructure*) underlying theory (θεωρία). The traditional opposition between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ is thus destructured in the relationship with the ‘absolutely other,’ Levinas contends (TI 29).

Intersubjective space is curved, Levinas will argue, because in it ‘distance’ is inflected into ‘elevation’ (TI 291). Levinas contests the account of the spatiality of Dasein Heidegger presents in the First Division of *Being and Time*. There, we recall, Heidegger identifies ‘de-severance’ (*Ent-fernung*) and ‘directionality’ (*Ausrichtung*) as ‘constitutive characteristics’ of Being-in-the-world, and as ‘determinate for Dasein’s spatiality’ (BT §23 [110]). De-severance, an existentielle, consists in ‘making the remoteness of something disappear,’ and ‘bringing it close’ (BT §23 [105]). Through de-severing (*Entfernen*), *Dasein* permits a being to be ‘encountered close by’ as ‘the entity which it is (BT §23 [105]). Distance, in an objective, quantifiable and metric sense, presupposes the de-severant being of Dasein, orienting itself according to the ‘remoteness’ and ‘closeness’ of that which is ready-to-hand within the world (BT §23 [106]). Directionality, simply underscores the fact that any act of *Näherung* or ‘bringing close,’ is always already directed towards a predelineated region of circumspection ‘out of which what is de-severed brings itself close’ (BT §23 [108]). It is therefore because Dasein is primordially spatial that ready-to-hand entities can in turn be ‘encountered’ as spatial. The interplay, or *Spielraum*, between the ‘here’ (*Hier*) of de-severant Dasein, and the ‘yonder’ (*Dort*) of ready-to-hand entities toward which Dasein comports itself in the world, regulates the distantiation that Heidegger discerns to be the ‘phenomenal basis’ upon which scientific accounts of space and spatiality are founded (BT §24 [112]). Here Heidegger appropriates and adapts Husserl’s insight that the homogeneous space surveyed by the mathematical sciences is itself the result of an *Erweiterung*, or ‘apperceptive expansion,’ of the immediate lived space proximate to the ego in its ‘core-world’ (*Kernwelt*).

Ethical space, however, inflects the distance of de-severant Dasein into elevation because the Other I encounter is not an entity with which I have dealings (or a thing given to manipulability (*Handlichkeit*)), nor one whom I dwell ‘alongside’ (*bei*) as a *Heimgenosse* in a *Heimland*. The Other person, qua stranger (*étranger*), turns toward me from a foreign sphere (a sphere out with the remit of my kinaesthetically constituted *Nahsphäre*, and immune to the rays of intentional regard

(*Ichstrahlen*) emanating from it), prescinding the lateral dimension Levinas believes to dominate the *Daseinsanalytik* and reversing the centrifugal orientation of Dasein's turning toward things into the Other's turning toward the existent. The relation with the Other is a 'relation with a certain depth' (*OF* 10), rather than a relation with a horizon of disclosure, or an equipmental region. I am encountered by the Other (who does not reside in a preordained *Gegend* of manageability) in whom 'humility is joined with height' (*MS* 54). Of course, Heidegger himself recognises that 'Being toward others is ontologically different from Being toward things,' (*BT* §26 [124]) and, indeed, that *Mitsein* or Being-with, is equiprimordial with the Being that *Dasein* 'is.' However, others 'show themselves in the world in their special environmental Being,' their 'disclosedness' having been 'constituted' beforehand (along with ready-to-hand entities) against the horizon of the 'worldhood' (*Weltlichkeit*) of the 'world' (*BT* §26 [123]). Others show themselves, therefore, in terms of what is ready-to-hand in that world (*BT* §26 [123]), Levinas believes.

Levinas censures Heidegger for his failure to account for the vertical dimension of ethicality in the presentation of solicitude he advances in *Being and Time* (an *aporia* Levinas believes to characterize all of Heidegger's subsequent work, despite the fact that his reading of 'later' Heidegger is cursory at the best of times). Heidegger's purported analyses of factual life (*faktischesleben*) obviate the question of how Dasein comes to be encountered by the Other, and do not consider the imperative force with which Dasein is confronted upon meeting the other person amidst the general commerce of quotidian life in the world. Despite (in his early *opuscula*) reproaching Husserl for his 'intellectualism,' and for favouring the ataraxy of 'theoretical contemplation' as the 'attitude' in which the 'world' is 'given' (*TIHP* 119) – even though Husserl attained the 'profound idea' that in the ontological domain 'the world of science is posterior to and depends on the vague and concrete world of perception' (*TIHP* 119) – and despite (in those same early works) commending the protognostic approach of Heidegger in which the world is presented as a 'center of action' and as a 'field of activity' (*TIHP* 119), Levinas finds Heidegger's explication of spatiality inadequate to the situation of ethics. The Heideggerian account of the 'other' cannot do justice to the 'radical heterogeneity' (*hétérogénéité radicale*) of beings, for it remains committed to the 'primacy of the panoramic' (*primat du panoramique*): the conciliation between beings Heidegger



proposes is thus a product of their horizontality, Levinas will contend (TI 294; *Tel* 327-8).

In the order of Levinas' thinking, the 'space' of the face-to-face relation (ethical space as such) exhibits a certain anteriority with respect to the region of pure consciousness adumbrated by Husserl, and to the totality of Dasein's structural whole, or 'care' (*Sorge*), enunciated by Heidegger. Ethical space is primordial, or, rather, it is anarchic. As Derrida observes, with his customary perspicuity, the height of the one who approaches from *mi-elyon*, or from on high, 'does not belong to space' (which, Derrida suggests, is why the trope of height deconstructs the idiom in which it is protracted), not simply because 'it is foreign to space,' but rather because 'within space it is the origin of space, orienting space through speech and glance,' through that is, the face (*le visage*) that 'commands body and space from above' (Derrida, 1978, 101).

The space revealed to the ethical aptitude substructures the perceptual space that is the emprise of eidetic science. Space can, no doubt, be studied, with Husserl, in its essence; the 'descriptive science of space is not geometry' after all, for, as remarked, 'the space studied by geometry is *already* idealized' (TIHP 118; emphasis added). But is the non-Euclidean space of concrete life, to which Husserl directs his critical attention in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, not itself already oriented by the norms of phenomenological science? Levinas believes this to be the case. As I will attempt to demonstrate, however, Levinas' own series of ethical reductions inadvertently commit a similar act of delimitation, predicated upon the normativity of the face. Perhaps Levinas is himself, in the words of Husserl, 'incapable of bringing' that which occupies 'his field of intuition' into his own 'field of judgment' (*Id* §22). If and why Levinas might be either unwilling, or unable, to think the face from the hither side of his own 'teaching' of the face, and thus perform a critical move at the threshold of his own critique of critical philosophy, must be assessed. It may be that Levinas is too 'loaded down with tradition' to extricate himself from the encumbrance of its effects upon him. One need not, of course, interpret the effects of tradition as entirely 'pernicious,' as, indeed, Heidegger is apt to do in an early essay on Karl Jasper's



*Psychologie des Weltanschauungen*, to recognise its tendency, on occasion, to dull phenomenological acumen.<sup>3</sup>

Concrete, lived space (*Leibesraum*) cannot, Husserl maintains, be subjected to the exacting analyses of the physical sciences without undergoing a severe deformation. The inexact data of perceptual acts refuse to submit to the exactitude of scientific scrutiny. Scientific concepts place a veritable *Ideenkleid* over the *Lebenswelt* in which the kinaesthetically functioning lived body (*Leib*) holds sway (*Crisis* §51). Yet, this admission in no way depreciates the authority of perceptual givenness. It simply indicates that such givenness must, as Levinas correctly notes, 'be described by means of morphological notions' (*TIHP* 118). The inexact data of perceptual acts are structured correlatively by concatenations of inexact *eide* or essences.

In *Being and Time* such phenomenological 'morphology' is articulated relative to the kinds of deserverances in which Dasein comports itself. Thus, seemingly inaccurate appraisals of distance, such as something being a 'good walk,' or a 'stone's throw' away (*BT* §23 [105]), obtain a descriptive authority in the region of Dasein's circumspective concern. Arguably, Levinas appropriates the insights of Heidegger's deconstructive reading of Husserl, translating them into his own ethical register, and subsequently deploys these very insights, in adapted form, to sanction his ongoing polemic against Heidegger. A perfidious move, one might argue, were it not for the concessions of indebtedness to Heidegger that accompany Levinas' early, pre-war writings. The ensemble of terms Levinas employs to explicate the inflection of ethical space ('height' (*hauteur*), 'depth' (*profondeur*), 'curvature' (*courbure*)), which, he claims, belies variously, geometric space, kinaesthetic space and the pratognostic space of de-severant Dasein, are likewise descriptively 'vague' and imprecise. Yet the very space, or spacing (*espacement*), they are undertaken to describe is pre-objective, proto-logical and, indeed, proto-phenomenological. All scientificity, therefore, buckles before the face and the dimension of depth in which it opens. The face is precisely beyond measure (*démasure*) (*TI* 62), the exactitude of the calculative sciences ceding to the exacting demands made upon the subject by the Other.

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<sup>3</sup> See Martin Heidegger, 'Comments on Karl Jasper's *Psychology of Worldviews*,' in *Pathmarks*, edited by W. McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 29).

Yet, Levinas' presentation of the face is measured, I would argue. The signification he defends is (s)elective. The immeasurable (*incommensurable*) does not grace the face of the nonhuman. The conventionally inanimate is not, apropos of Levinas, inordinate (*démesuré*), for, as he maintains, the face of the human other alone 'signifies' as such. An ethically bound sublimity – a sublimity bound by the limits (πέρας) of the face and thus, as such, boundless (although, arguably, it is a boundlessness set within limits) – attends the encounter with the face. A sublimity which is neither occasioned by the magnitude of natural phenomena, nor announced in the super-sensible destiny of the mind, but which rather marks the humility of the ethical subject before the other it serves. A limit is drawn here in the work of Levinas, therefore, and a breach opened, a limit we may need to transgress.

Heidegger proposes 'seeing' and 'hearing' as 'distance-senses' (*Fernsinne*), arguing that it is in them that 'Dasein as *deseverant* mainly dwells' (*BT* §23 [107]). Clearly, aurality and sight are entirely pertinent to the analysis of *deseverance* Heidegger presents in *Being and Time*, and Dasein's being-toward that which is ready-to-hand is, no doubt, largely conducted in these modalities of sense, particularly that of 'sight' (*Sicht*) (*BT* §§15-36). Tactility, and moreover, tactuality, is something of an *aporia* in *Being and Time*, however (and throughout the Heideggerian corpus) and this thematic lacuna informs Levinas' own analyses of the 'distantiation' characteristic of ethical space. Although, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the relation with the Other (*Autrui*) as a 'relation with the non-touchable' (*TI* 172), it remains one of 'contact,' albeit 'across a distance' (*TI* 172), an ethically reconfigured mode of contact 'that does not compromise the integrity of what is touched,' a veritable 'contact with the intangible,' as it were (*TI* 50). Such 'contact,' rather like the Kantian 'reverence' (*Ehrfurcht*), or 'feeling' (*gefühl*), for the moral law, is different in kind from that which defines the correspondence between the hand and the surfaces of things.

Unlike Kant, for whom reverence (*Ehrfurcht*) 'is a feeling,' but 'not a feeling received through outside influences' (i.e., mere inclination), the ethical contact Levinas details is an exposure to the outside itself, vis-à-vis the exteriority of the face. Kantian reverence is, moreover, 'self-produced' through the mediation of the 'rational concept,' and attests to the moral agent's immediate awareness of the determination of its will by the law. Reverence is regarded as 'the effect of the law on the subject,' an affect that 'demolishes' self-love (Kant, 1991, 66-67). While

Levinas certainly concurs with the ‘demolition’ of self-love Kant describes – Levinas’ ongoing diatribe against the *conatus essendi* is entirely in keeping with the thought of Kant here – exposure to the face is not mediated through a third term (although the intensity of the encounter is interrupted by the mediation of the third party, as we shall discover). Furthermore, ‘contact’ is a being put into contact with the face in its ‘exteriority,’ a hetero-affection that one undergoes.

Despite declaring his own thought to be ‘particularly close’ to ‘the practical philosophy of Kant’ (*OF* 10), a thought in which Levinas discerns a ‘meaning in the human’ not measured by ‘ontology’ (*HA* 138), the humanism of the other ‘man’ Levinas promulgates situates the categorical imperative in the face of the Other. Sensibility is immediately rational, rationality is immediately sensible. The *a priori* forms of sensibility, set forth by Kant in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, are de-formalized in the relation with the face. I ‘universalize myself,’ Levinas asserts, rather than execute a law through an adherence to maxims (*OBBE* 126). The law does not mediate this *relation sans relation*, Levinas argues, because the face signifies καθ’ αὐτό. Kant will, of course, acknowledge that the law I recognize, the law ‘I recognize with reverence’ – indeed, the law is the sole ‘object’ of reverence as such – subordinates my will to it without appealing to the sensibilia occasioned by the ‘mediation of external influences’ upon my senses (Kant, 1991, 66). The exteriority of the moral law obligates *ex mero motu*. I respect others, qua rational beings, because they are capable of observing the moral law within them, and self-legislating their conduct accordingly.

But, can the ethical intuition (*Anschauung*) Levinas advocates lay any greater claim to being the *intuitus originarius* than the feeling for the moral law espoused by Kant? To be sure, Levinas will maintain that sensation, which is at the ‘basis of sensible experience and intuition,’ is not ‘reducible to the clarity or the idea’ derived from it (*OBBE* 63). Furthermore, sensation is defined by its radical ‘vulnerability,’ a vulnerability purged of the legislative spontaneity that characterizes Kantian *Ehrfurcht*. Of course, the *An-schauung* Levinas defends (an ethically inspired intuition that is the counterpart to the ethical *Sinngebung* he prizes) is diametrically opposed to the kind of ‘clear’ and ‘distinct’ ‘self-evidence’ Husserl (and Kant) nominate under this heading. If ‘intuition’ is characterized by degrees of fulfilment (*Erfüllung*) – namely, the degree to which an intentional act is fulfilled evidentially – and is, likewise, the presence, ‘in person’ (*selbstgegeben*), of an object

before consciousness, then, clearly, the susceptibility Levinas details cannot be awarded this designation. Principally, then, Levinas rejects the actional component of intuition. Even as pure receptivity, what is given intuitively is proportionate to intentional fulfilment (*Erfüllung*). The figure of the given is cut to the cloth of intentionality, as it were. But the face, we recall, is quite beyond measure. In fact, the face is that which ‘measures me’ (*PII* 57).

Arguably, therefore, Levinasian intuition is best understood as *in-tuition*, for the Other ‘introduces into me’ (non-maieutically, Levinas assures us) ‘what was not in me’ (*TI* 203). Although, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will liken this ‘incessant teaching’ to a ‘reception’ (*TI* 204), in *Otherwise than Being* the notion of susception comes to dominate his analysis of subjectivity. However, despite insisting, in this latter work, that the ‘saying’ signifies ‘without stopping’ or coming to rest in the ‘said,’ and, as such, does not revert ‘to disclosure in a consciousness,’ or go back to the ‘holding pen’ of intentionality (*OBBE* 190n.34), Levinas does, it seems, retain the privilege of a certain constitutive licence. The face that summons me is always the ‘face’ of the human other. Thus, one might argue, that where Kantian philosophy is critical (or Critique), Levinasian first philosophy (*philosophie première*) is epicritical (or Epicritique). This appears to be the case, because the subject-hostage is *able to discriminate* between different forms of sensation. Proto-ethical sensibility entails, it seems, a complex haptic science. Moreover, while one might agree with Levinas that the self is not primarily receptive, it is not wholly susceptible either, but is rather perhaps a chiasmic blend of susception and proprioception, ‘host’ and ‘hostage.’

The ‘transcendent,’ as Levinas states, may well ‘cut across sensibility’ (*TI* 193), cutting conation to the quick. However, such decussation is regulated by an epicritical faculty of (the) ‘understanding’ which ultimately limits the latitude of my susceptibility and presides over the administration of pneumatological space. The *in-tuition* of the face is limited by the concept of the human, which, according to Levinas, finds its fulfilment in the face. Now, phenomenology, as Husserl maintains, circumscribes a field of ‘painfully achieved findings’ (*Id* §87). This is incontestable, I think. Yet, despite inverting the field of pure consciousness (and subverting the ego-advertence that governs it) and reconceiving the phenomenological ‘field’ as a field of exposedness (i.e., *me voïci*), Levinas palliates the severity, and the extent, of

the 'pain' the ethical subject endures, by controlling the variables, or, let us say, the dosage, of faciality.

Contact is, of course, an integral moment of the erotic relation, as evidenced by the analyses of voluptuousness presented in *Totality and Infinity*, and is therefore, at least according to the strictures of Levinas' own account, beyond the ambit of what may properly be taken to signify as ethical. However, in this very work, Levinas will also repeatedly emphasize the centrality of sensibility in his explication of the proto-ethical relation. The existent is *mise en question* and this being put into question – which Levinas identifies as the essential movement of 'ethics' (TI 43) – is not a 'theoretical' proposition, or an instance of quizzical badinage, but rather the holding in contention (or suspension) of the 'being' of the existent. Its being, which remains, as Heidegger would say, an 'issue' for it (BT §4 [12]), is now doubly irksome. For this very being is held to account (held to ransom as the 'metaphor' of the *ôtage* would suggest) by the Other, and 'nothing is more burdensome than a neighbor,' Levinas confirms (OBBE 88). The being that is a 'burden' for me is my being-for-the-other. Being is materiality, and the existent is substantial to the degree that it shoulders, qua responsible subject, the responsibility for others with which it is assigned. Yet how does one distinguish between these two modalities of contact; how is each apportioned its range and fixed in its determination by Levinas? The tension adduced above is partly eased in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, as we will discover proximately, where contact is ethically reconstructed as vulnerability and exposedness, materiality being recast as *martyrality* (OBBE 146) and, indeed, as *materiality*. It is subject to debate whether Levinas successfully resolves the tension between the 'erotic' and the 'ethical,' however. Perhaps the torsion (OBBE 107), which defines his attempts to twist free from, and simultaneously uphold, the schism that troubles his account of the contactual, is itself more indicative of the 'enigma' he struggles to describe under the rubric of the face than the accounts of the face he himself assays. One could argue, of course, that this is precisely Levinas' intention, and that the dead time (*temps mort*) between the Other and myself is the 'place' where ethical filiation and disaffiliation are crossed (X), like lovers whose paths cross only to disunite before they consummate their relation with a 'child,' a child through which, according to Levinas, their congress takes on meaning, or makes sense (*sens*).



## § 7. Gradient and inflection

Intersubjective space is 'asymmetrical' (*EE* 95) and the 'curvature' (*courbure*) in which this inflection is inscribed is the very 'gradient' (*denivellement*) of transcendence itself, Levinas proclaims (*TI* 86). This 'curvature of being' quite literally severs the de-severant being of Dasein and reorients it vertically. Significantly, the relation with the Other (this *relation sans relation* (*TI* 80; *TeI* 79), or *rapport sans rapport* (*TI* 295; *TeI* 329)) takes place 'across a void,' a void (*vide*) (*TI* 172) in which the 'proximity' of the Other and the 'distance' between 'him' and 'me' is 'wholly maintained' (*EE* 95). The separation (*séparation*) between the 'same' and the 'other' is the site of holiness (*sainteté*) itself, therefore. However, it often appears as if the obsecrations of the Other, entreating me to answer for my *place au soleil*, are 'holy' orders only to the extent that they issue from this space of 'conjunction' (*TI* 215), and not from any valency they themselves might possess, a suggestion to which we will attend further in part three of this study.

As Levinas adverts, 'alterity starts from me' (*TI* 40). The face-to-face relation is primordial (and we recall from chapter one that Levinas, Husserl and Heidegger are engaged in a philosophical altercation regarding the status of primordially) and yet, clearly, it cannot arise without the 'terms that are placed in it' (*TI* 215). It is in this interspace, engendered by the seeming discordance between the 'proximity' and the 'duality' of beings, that Levinas locates the pathos (πάθος) of philosophy (*EE* 95). Philosophy begins in the wonder of the face-to-face (*face-à-face*) relation, and the astonishment (*étonnement*), in which it is inaugurated, is a product of this originary *espacement* of being. The ethical *déstructure* is thus primary, and its 'primacy' is that of 'an irreducible structure upon which all other structures rest' (*TI* 79). Arguably, this 'structure' – transcendence is the 'ethical structure,' Levinas argues (*GP* 147) – assumes the importance within Levinas' project that the concept of intentionality holds within that of Husserl. If, as Levinas himself concedes, the 'fundamental property of consciousness' is intentionality, and Husserl's 'great originality' stems from his recognition that 'it is the relation to the object that is the primitive phenomenon and not a subject and an object that would supposedly move toward one another' (*OI* 13), then it would appear to be entirely apposite to construe the ethical *déstructure* in similarly irreducible terms; apposite because the relationship between the thought of Levinas and Husserl is arguably one of apposition, I would contend.



This is not to claim, however, that the ethical relation, or ‘unrelating relation’ (TI 295), is intentional, despite Levinas’ propensity (up to and including the publication of *Totality and Infinity* in 1961) to frame the relation with the Other (*Autrui*) in the language of intentionality and presence. Perhaps one may discern something approximating to a Levinasian *Kehre*, or turn, in this regard, around the time of the essay ‘Intentionality and Sensation’ (1965). For here, Levinas begins to employ the concept of ‘diachrony’ (*diachronie*) to describe a relation with that which does not coincide with the origin of the Ego and its transcendental work. He will speak, thus, of ‘a diachrony stronger than structural synchronism’ (IS 148), and a movement that demolishes ‘the predelineated limits of structure’ (IS 149). Certainly, by the publication of *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), Levinas will have rethought subjectivity as the relation to the Other (much the way in which Dasein is exposedness). This ‘relation’ is dramatized across the surface of the flesh. The body, or *corps éthique*, as I will refer to it, is thus the site of ethical performativity. ‘Here’ (the *hic* in question being the *Hier* of *Hiersein*, or *me voici*) the ‘good’ is ‘accomplished’ as a bearing of the Other. Intentionality is ultimately consummated in the act of ethical portage (less perhaps an ‘act,’ subject to the directives of volition, than the ‘uprightness,’ or *Temimut*, of an ethically transcribed ‘integrity’ (TOT 48) in which my ludic existence is put out of play by the Other and ‘my’ contra-natural identity, qua one who bears, is awoken). The structuration of ethics is concretized through the very embodiment of its performance. This structuration, I maintain, is the ethical body (*corps éthique*) itself, the subject in its susceptibility. This ethical soma (σώμα) is the significance of nonindifference, an exposedness that cannot be fixed structurally as a correlative of consciousness (OBBE 70), but which submits the ‘biological’ and the ‘natural’ to a ‘higher structure’ (OBBE 109), a pre-structural structure, or anarchic ἀρχή, as it were.

The ‘relationship’ with the Other is not ‘spatial,’ Levinas insists, if ‘space’ is taken to be the product of geometrization. Rather, the relationship with the Other (*Autrui*) institutes a ‘return to exterior being’ (TI 183). The distance extended by exteriority ‘immediately extends to height’ (TI 297), thus the exteriority (the dimension of depth) in which the face opens is an ‘original form of exteriority’ (EE 95), which, Levinas advises, ‘takes us beyond the categories of unity and multiplicity which are valid for things’ (EE 95). The relationship with the Other ‘alone’ introduces the ‘dimension of transcendence’ (TI 193), Levinas will maintain.

Exteriority does not ‘terminate the drawing out of a form in it,’ (GP 133) and its apparent vacuity – exteriority is space *par excellence* or the excellence of space – does not congeal into the noematic correlate of a mental act. Exteriority is ‘uncontained’ (GP 133), it is inordinate and quite beyond measure. In point of fact, it is that by which ‘I measure myself’ (PII 55), taking my bearings, as one who bears, from the directive of the face. The face is ‘preeminently the presence of exteriority,’ (TI 66) Levinas argues, because the modality of height, from which it signifies καθ’ αὐτό, is extended in discourse and not, as we have previously noted, through the medium of ‘vision.’ For ‘vision,’ Levinas urges, ‘is essentially an adequation of exteriority and interiority’ (TI 295). Discourse, then, cannot be ‘converted into interiority,’ because the face ‘overflows’ the ‘sphere of the same’ (TI 195) from which the spection (arguably a form of introspection) basic to phenomenological science, performs its scansion of the world.

Significantly, as Levinas will argue throughout *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, the exposure to the openness of the face effects the ‘opening up’ (*dé-claustration*) of the ‘oneself’ in such a way that this opening up is not a ‘being-in-the-world’ (OBBE 180). Again, the ‘distance’ extended by ‘exteriority’ – a distance altogether more ‘radical’ than ‘every distance in the world’ (TI 209) – constitutes the ‘elementary fact of morality’ (TI 297). This distance, moreover, is more archaic than the ‘distance’ (hypostatic space) at which the existent, in its separated being, finds itself from itself. The ‘conjuncture’ between self and Other, a conjuncture that orients and separates the dyads that take form within it, is, Levinas will maintain, and contra Durkheim (a figure who along with thinkers such as Ernst Cassirer and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl haunts the pages of *Totality and Infinity*), the elementary ‘form’ of religious life, a form, or rather *déstructure*, that is at once the substratum of quotidian life because in and through it the ‘sincerity’ (the ‘purity’) of everyday life is revealed.

Granted that *philosophia prôtê* (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) is in contention here, and that Levinas will strive to eradicate all designations of ‘first philosophy’ as theory (θεωρία), it is perhaps hardly surprising that his work is interspersed (one might say it is interspaced) with references to the rudimental and the archontic. The reiteration of these leitmotifs (motifs of primordality which accompany his ethical reworking of wonder as the ἀρχή of philosophy, the requisite τόπος of wonder being the face of the other person) serves to reinforce the appeal of Levinas’ own

claim that ‘morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy’ (TI 304; emphasis added). However, if philosophy is ramiform, and if, broadly speaking, its composition is dendritical, that is, tree like, then Levinasian first philosophy (*philosophie première*), in keeping with its claims to radicality, asserts itself as the radix of this ‘tree.’<sup>4</sup> But in what soil do the roots of this tree take hold? The following question, broached by Heidegger in relation to metaphysics (τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά) applies equally to the discipline of ‘ethical metaphysics,’ I would suggest. Heidegger inquires: ‘out of what ground do the roots, and thereby the whole tree’ (namely the tree of metaphysics) ‘receive their nourishing juices and strength?’ He continues: ‘what element, concealed in the ground and soil’ of this tree, ‘enters and lives in the roots that support and nourish the tree?’ (Heidegger, 1996 [1949], 277).

Evidently, and in response to Heidegger’s line of inquiry, Levinas’ work is sourced in two ‘cultures,’ the Jewish and the Greek, and both afford his thought sustenance. (Although, this may be something of an oversimplification to which scholars of Levinas’ philosophy have given undue credence. For Levinas’ thought is a miscegenation of some pedigree, a complex mixture of Lithuania, Russian, French, and German influences that do not lend themselves easily to such simple classification.) Heidegger’s question must be supplemented by another, therefore, since the crux of the issue at stake here concerns the nature of the balance between these two discrete sources, and the stability with which their confluence provides ‘philosophy.’ The very sense of ‘philosophy’ is thus under scrutiny, and Levinas’ whole œuvre works to negotiate (and works by negotiating) a settlement between these two cultural sites, a settlement that is ultimately atopic, or rather eutopic, because it is construed, in processual terms, as an ongoing advertence to the ‘Good.’ The cogency of Levinas’ philosophical claims, very much depends upon the extent to which one is prepared to entertain the plausibility of the cultural cross-fertilization he commends.<sup>5</sup> Yet, does philosophy really require a Jewish Midrash, one may ask? Are

<sup>4</sup> Descartes’ comments, taken from a letter he wrote to Picot (who translated the *Principia Philosophiae* into French) are illustrative of this conceptualization of philosophy: ‘Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree: the roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches that issue from the trunk are all the other sciences.’ See Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to “What is Metaphysics?”* (Fifth edition, 1949), p. 277, in *Martin Heidegger: Pathmarks*.

<sup>5</sup> Levinas’ (an)archaeology of language is poietic therefore. Rather than introduce a coterie of new terms, through which to communicate his thought (he does, needless to say produce a number of neologisms during the course of his career) he reinvests ‘traditional’ philosophical (and theological) concepts with significance, remoulding them in accordance with the ethical imperative that regulates his project. The concept, or *Begriff*, is thus the site of philosophical ἀγώνια, a tension, or torsion, between the Jewish and Greek registers in which Levinas’ thought is advanced.

we to exclude the wisdom of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, for example, from the philosophical ‘pact’ affirmed by Levinas here? If, as Levinas intimates in *Beyond the Subject*, ‘everything’ falling outside the particular settlement he envisages is tantamount to nothing more than ‘local colour’ (AC 198) – ‘Judaism teaches us a real transcendence’ (RFA 16), he opines – then are we not obligated to challenge the provincialism of the philosophical accord he himself broaches? Can such an accord really do justice to the concrete particularity (and locality) of the Other? And is the spirit of a somewhat degenerate (and de-generative) triumphalism not alive and well in Levinas’ thought? Have ‘all men of goodwill,’ as Levinas asserts, really ‘consented’ to the ‘history of Israel,’ one may wonder (ITN 31)?

In *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche champions the notion that, as he puts it, ‘our thoughts should grow out of our values with the same necessity as the fruit out of the tree.’ Should one find these ‘fruits unpalatable,’ he declares, then so be it, for such disgust does not trouble the ‘tree,’ nor should it concern the ‘philosopher’ (Nietzsche, 1956, 150). Accordingly, and issuing, it seems, from a similar necessity, Levinas’ phenomenology stems from the *Sitz-im-Leben* of Jewish facticity, and ‘bears testimony,’ as Nietzsche would have it, to the soil of Jewish axiological life. And what of it, one may justifiably ask. One has reason to impugn Levinas not because he blends Jewish and Greek registers of thought, but because he presents Judaism as philosophy’s wet nurse (*nourrice*), as if (specifically) Jewish wisdom were indispensable for the parturition, birth, and subsequent maturation of philosophical φρόνησις. How opportune, then, that the Hebrew word ‘Torah’ should derive from an etymological root meaning to ‘shoot forth,’ or ‘permeate’ (aptly rhizomatic, one notes), and come to connote ‘teaching,’ or ‘instruction’ (Newton, 2001, 70). For arguably, apropos of Levinas, the Torah is to instruct philosophy in its practice and dispel the nescience to which it has succumb. Once again, one is left perplexed. Does philosophy (φιλοσοφία) really require the ‘authoritative educational intervention’ of the Jewish community, as Levinas advocates (ORLFG 97)? How is such a claim to be corroborated, and by what logic is it confirmed? Indeed, were such a claim to be verified, one would need to provide a quite extraordinary *Bildungsgeschichte* to account for philosophy’s educational ancestry. If the philosophical λόγος is undercut by the ‘wisdom of love [*sagesse de l’amour*’] (OBBE 161; AE 253), as Levinas argues, and love, precisely as an-archic, disrupts the sovereignty of the ἀρχή, then how can one possibly identify the reign of love

with the constraints of a particular historico-cultural tradition? Is not to argue thus tantamount to bunkum, or non-sense?

Some critics would maintain that the strength of Levinas' arguments regarding the face, and the injunction it levies, is predicated upon the frequency and force of his iterative pronouncements. Since prolixity, and the various terminological refrains to which Levinas has recourse, do not guarantee proficiency in philosophical argumentation, Levinas' ethical proposal is (perhaps) left resting on *terra infirma*. Indeed, is Levinas' particular brand of ethical metaphysics not guilty of drawing philosophy into that very 'rarefied atmosphere' (*MBCJ* 18) in which Levinas himself locates the thought of Buber? Does the ethical, *pace* Levinas, not at times resemble a kind of geometry of the ethereal? Do the words which greeted the prospective student upon arrival at Plato's Academy, οὐδείς ἄγεωμέτρητος εἰσίτω, not apply equally well to the school of Levinasian first philosophy? Thus, must one not be 'well versed in geometry to enter' the space of ethical operation, well versed in, and therefore heedful of, the face of the other person *as Levinas describes it*?

It may be, as Levinas suggests, that 'only the face in its morality is exterior' (*TI* 262), and that the analyses of *Totality and Infinity* (a book which purports, lest we forget, to be an 'essay on exteriority') endeavour to give such exteriority (*extériorité*) its proper due. However, if Levinas' proposal that the 'other's entire being is constituted by its exteriority' (*TO* 75) is to be taken seriously alongside his conviction that the Other, qua interlocutor, is 'forever outside' (*TI* 295) the sphere of constitutional activity, does the prospective reader of Levinas' work not find him or herself mired in an exegetical quandary? Even if Levinas contests Husserl's declaration that 'transcendental subjectivity is the universe of possible sense,' and that, accordingly, 'an outside is precisely – nonsense,' how can he circumvent Husserl's proviso that 'nonsense' itself 'is always a mode of sense and has its nonsensicalness within the sphere of possible insight' (*CM* §41 [117])?

Certainly, in his early critique of Levinas, Derrida questions the legitimacy of this basic Levinasian move, underscoring 'space' as the 'wound and finitude of birth without which one could not even open' the language in which Levinas situates morality; and, moreover, without which 'one could not even have a true or false exteriority to speak of' (Derrida, 1978, 112). Surely, as Derrida opines, the very distinction found to be operative in Levinas' philosophy here, between a crude 'spatial' exteriority, and the 'true' exteriority of ethical space, adverts to the fact that



there can be no philosophical logos (λόγος) which must not 'first let itself be expatriated' into the inside-outside structure appertinent to phenomenological science (Derrida, 1978, 112).

If space is the cradle of natality, as such, and the guarantor of the primogeniture of the face, that is, the origin of sense (*sens*), then how can the alterity that is, after all, the preserve of Levinas' thinking, resist the contagion of Being?<sup>6</sup> The constant emphasis Levinas places upon the purity of the ethical *face-à-face* and the 'inviolability of the Other' (*TI* 195), is surely *undermined* by the contamination deduced here. Indeed, one may legitimately question the requirement for 'purity' that informs Levinas' project. Why does Levinas insist upon the purity (*pureté*) of the face and the unadulterated nature of the encounter with the Other? The motif of purity, as is well known, is conceptually basic to the programme of phenomenology instituted by Husserl. 'Pure consciousness' determines the 'field of phenomenology' (*Id* §39) and the 'being' that Husserl strives to explicate is designated as the 'pure Ego' (*reines Ich*) or transcendental bearer of 'pure mental processes' (*Id* §33), processes which, through scrupulous eidetic analysis, disclose the 'pure ownness' (*Id* §34) of the cogitations that concatenate to compose them. By reiterating the purity of the field excavated by phenomenological science (a policy common to all of Husserl's major works) Husserl reinforces the primacy of the 'originary' and the 'original' within phenomenological research. In point of fact, the Husserlian œuvre works precisely as a work, lending itself to performance (although in a manner altogether less dramatic than that of Levinas), through the systematic application, emphasis and reiteration of these basic terms. It is by way of such performance, Husserl concludes, that phenomenology is able to transform its 'radicalness' into an 'actual deed' (*CM* §3 [50]).

Levinas' contestation of the primordially of the field of pure consciousness, adverts at once to his revaluation of philosophy as ethics – philosophy works through its very unworking, the vicissitudes of language must be undone, the said continually unsaid – and the sense in which the 'astonishing adventure' (*OBBE* 44) of ethical life astonishes precisely because the event, whose advent it 'works' to honour, interrupts the adventure of Western thought. Such adventures, 'adventures traversed as by

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<sup>6</sup> Levinas will ultimately maintain, *contra* Derrida, that 'signification as proximity,' that is, signification construed as *contactual space*, attests to the 'latent birth of the subject [*naissance latente du sujet*]' (*OBBE* 139; *AE* 218).



Ulysses' (TI 27), that is, regressions back to domiciliary life, and exemplified, Levinas believes, in the thought of Husserl and Heidegger, are antithetical to Levinas' own project, despite his admission that phenomenology makes possible the 'passage' from 'ethics' to 'metaphysical exteriority' (TI 29). Phenomenology may grant *πόρος* to ethical metaphysics, but its findings are *undermined* by the reductions performed by Levinas, to employ, once again, the analogy with archaeology; and Western philosophy is, Levinas suggests, 'essentially archaeology' (NGTT 126). The field of ethics (*champs éthique*) Levinas 'excavates' surpasses the limen of pure consciousness, and the limes of rigorous science (*streng Wissenschaft*). The ethical *déstructure* is thus *preliminary* (OBBE 44), and it is pure because the interval it delimits (the separation (*séparation*) intrinsic to ethical space) preserves the alterity of the 'Other' from profanation by the 'Same,' thereby protecting the other person from the monstrations of thematization. The 'adventure' of 'holiness,' Levinas declares, interrupts the 'obstinacy of being' (OUJ 231).

### § 8. *Behind the face*

The ethical, one might contend, is the *arsis* (ἄρσις), the retraction or de-positing, of the *thesis* (θέσις), the stating or positing, of phenomenology.<sup>7</sup> The alternance of θέσις and ἄρσις, reflected in the high scepticism of *Otherwise than Being*, with its vacillation between *credo* and *dubito*, opens the field of ethical metaphysics. Phenomenology, which might endeavour to penetrate the dark continent of conscious life, illuminating the 'dark corners' of philosophical inquiry (Husserl, 1969, 95), fails to overcome the impasse of its own methodological restrictions and thus remains confined to the miasma of its *Urtatsache* or fundamental fact—the I. As such, phenomenology remains committed to the 'dark designs of inwardness' (OBBE 180). In limiting itself, first and foremost, to egology, Levinas argues, phenomenology misses the 'terrain of disinterestedness' (OBBE 45) revealed in the reduction to 'signification' he implements (disinterestedness here meaning the elevation of the 'ego' to 'me' (OBBE 126)). The philosopher assumes an 'unnatural position' (OBBE 44), therefore, not merely because the discipline he or she practices breaks with the

<sup>7</sup> If every 'thesis,' above all the θέσις that is phenomenology, is a 'welcome of presence,' as Levinas opines (OBBE 179), then the ethical, or, as I designate it above, the ἄρσις of phenomenology, is a 'passivity more passive than the receptivity of knowledge' (GP 148). The alternance of θέσις and ἄρσις mirrors the oscillation between scepticism, and the refutation of scepticism, that sets the 'methodological' tone for *Otherwise than Being*.

naïveté of ‘natural’ science (the purity of consciousness, for Husserl, testifies to its primacy), but because the love, whose ‘wisdom’ philosophy pursues, attests to an inversion of the natural, conative drive (and we will have recourse to scrutinize Levinas’ conceptualization of φύσις in chapter four above). The Other is no longer ‘naturalized’ by the Same (although Levinas does, to some extent, domesticate alterity by confining it to the face of the human other). Wisdom is ethically reconfigured as the work of love, and the wonder (θαυμάζειν) in which, according to Aristotle,<sup>8</sup> philosophy begins by putting an end to myth (μῦθος), is rethought by Levinas as the wonder of substitution, a wonder that suspends the reign of the *Überrationalismus* that governs the Husserlian enterprise of phenomenology. Philosophy, qua ethical portage, is not the labour of thematization (although thought is called to work by the Other). It is, rather, a ‘labor of the heart’ (*JK* 129), its work, a diacony without servility. First philosophy, so Levinas will argue, is therefore not egology, but ethics.

But is this work (ἔργον), a ‘work’ that works so hard to avoid complacency, and to avoid the abyss into which the ethical might descend should it affiliate itself too closely with ilyaity, not subservient to its own principle of regulation, that is, to its own *ergonomos*? How and why is the face pure in a way the pelt of an animal is not? Why is the face inverted and disfigured by ‘feminine’ being? Why is the ‘chastity’ and ‘decency’ of the face sullied by the ‘non-signifyingness’ of ‘erotic nudity’ (*TI* 263), where the congress of the erotic might well be an occasion for its accomplishment? The ‘night’ into which the ‘expression’ of the face descends here – the night of ardour and voluptuousity – and the ‘equivocation of silence’ into which it fades (*TI* 263), suggest that Levinas’ ethic of ethics operates within clearly defined parameters. The limes of rigorous science are replaced by those of ethical metaphysics, and the boundary stones of phenomenology are shifted to accord with the precinct of the ‘Holy’ (i.e., the face that stands in the trace of illeity) – that space of spaces – toward which philosophy is oriented (one could also argue, as Levinas does in *Beyond the Verbe*, that the subject itself ‘must become’ this ‘sanctuary,’ or ‘place of all holiness,’ and thus become ‘responsible for all holiness’ (*IGRHV* 159)). Levinas’ philosophy girds itself before the face, yet it is already bound, and hence limited, by the face it *posits*, a face which itself arguably profanes the enigma

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<sup>8</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (982b 12-13).

(ἀνίγμᾱ) it pledges to serve because it delimits alterity according to the custom to which it defers.

Does this alliance not follow, perhaps, from the fact that Levinas' work is a curious hybrid of rigorous and rabbinical science? Does a Halakhic zeal for fences and partitions (here manifest as the demarcation between that which faces and that which does not) not compromise the otherwise aggadic largesse that characterises the ethical relation Levinas presents? To be sure, Levinas likens the epiphany of the face to the 'nudity of the principle,' a principle, resplendent in its 'purity,' behind which 'there is nothing further' (TI 262). However, is the purity of this principium not dashed by the *drash* Levinas undertakes? It would seem that a complex ideational montage undergirds the expression of the face after all. Did Levinas forget to append a fifth section to *Totality and Infinity* – a section that might profitably have been entitled 'Behind the Face' – so formative a role does this Hebraic proscenium play in the ethical *mise-en-scène* he describes?

The face is menaced by the nonhuman creature, and tormented by the night of the erotic, akin to the way in which the parchments of the Torah (according to Levinas) are 'menaced' by an 'impudence of spirit' that would appropriate them without 'preparation' (FPB 24) and depredate their wisdom. Is the face defiled through its propinquity to the animal and the erotic (and thus rendered impure) because the relation with the animal and the erotic encounter are faceless and impersonal? Or, is the face rendered as such, and literally rent, because the 'busy hand' that would delimit the ethical (perhaps according to the four cubits of halakhic law) fails to respect the 'breath that lives within' (FPB 24) the sexualised body and the animal form, a breath arguably as holy as that which suffuses and empowers the interpretative enterprise of exegesis itself? Is the hand that would limit the compass of the ethical, not itself impure, rather than the faceless faces whose sanctity it would disclaim? Is Levinas' ethic not itself guilty of 'disequilibrium' in this regard (FPB 24), therefore, buoyed up, as it is to some degree, by the bombast of hyperbole? Indeed, it begins to look as if the face Levinas details may be intuited (in-tuited) if and only one undergoes the correct preparation, as he himself intimates. Levinas' face does not, it seems, signify καθ' αὐτό, so much as as the result of tutelage. The face may teach itself, but this teaching is mediate.

Phenomenologically speaking, the approach to the 'thing' is, we recall, part of the meaning of the thing. The animal and the erotic are profane, therefore, only to

the extent that the approach through which they are given is profanatory. The hand that approaches the nonhuman creature, or that which caresses the naked body, is impure, and not that which it approaches. The profane is profane, because it is designated to be so as a ‘product’ of co-constitutive endeavour (*Mitkonstitution*), and not by divine fiat. As Heidegger states, ‘meaning is an existentials of Dasein not a property attaching to entities, lying ‘behind’ them, or floating somewhere as an ‘indeterminate domain’ (*BT* §32 [151]). Levinas must face up to the fact that his account of the face is as much profectitious, as it is a description of the manifestation of the face in its exteriority.

One can argue, of course, that Levinas’ account of the face is predicated upon the very sense of heritability deduced here, in which case the historical contingency of his analysis itself attests to the radical passivity of the subject qua inheritor of communally mediated teachings and concepts.<sup>9</sup> There is clearly much at stake here, however. And, as I will hope to demonstrate, while Levinas’ presentation of the face is far from facile, his explication of the ‘phenomenological “circumstances” [*“circonstances” phénoménologique*]’ surrounding its facing me, is not altogether thorough (*GCM* xi; *DVI* 7). It may be, that the deductions he executes are the products (the ‘productions’) of a procedural apodeixis, deductions, that is, founded upon self-evidences that cannot be demonstrated phenomenologically, even if an ethically reduced subjectivity permits the description of phenomena (φαινόμενα) typically withheld from the field of pure consciousness. The particular ‘tropes of ethical language’ Levinas employs to express the seemingly paradoxical situation in which phenomenology finds itself before the ‘face,’ are, he concedes, simply ‘found to be adequate for certain structures’ of the descriptions he ventures (*OBBE* 120). The terms he deploys are, as it were, requisite to the task in hand because they suggest themselves as fitting. At best they are fortuitous, therefore. One might equally employ alternative tropes to communicate the ‘drama’ toward which Levinas’ descriptions gesture, tropes that might very well change the nature of the performance that unfolds within the space Levinas calls ethics.

The beyond, ‘from which the face solicits us,’ is not “‘another world” behind the world’ (*MS* 59), Levinas will argue. The ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας is ‘foreign

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<sup>9</sup> Levinas will argue, however, that ‘in valuing there arises a susceptibility that makes itself responsible *in spite of itself*. In its original influence, prior to any intentional movement, without the possibility of a free attitude towards it, value renders things “pure” or “impure”’ (*BPW* 183n.4). Levinas account of susceptibility will be subject to close scrutiny in part two of this study.

to definition and limit' (TRA 347). It would be flippant to interpret the 'beyond' (*au-delà*) of absolute exteriority in this way. However, as we have indicated, there is a 'world' behind the account of the face Levinas assays. As 'thrown,' Dasein is always already 'submitted to a world' (BT §74 [383]). A hermeneutical alliance pertains between the factual experience of the face and the conceptual orientation that is engendered from it, and remains within it. That which one is in a position to undergo as a face (the face is suffered by the subject), is bound up with one's historico-cultural predicament. One may submit to the aegis of the face. However, the face to which one submits oneself, submits itself to its own other, i.e., the cultural, religious, and historical forms in and through which it is constituted. The face, and the forms through which it is rendered and engendered, are interlaced down to the very *radix* of sense (*sens*), no matter how immemorial the fixture of signification purports to be. Ultimately, Levinas cannot eradicate this root. For, the concord adduced here provides the basic tension necessary to set his work to work. Arguably, any claim to sense such 'immemoriality' possesses draws its meaning from the binding of face and form *in illo tempore* and not, *pace* Levinas, from the passing of the absent One, *per se*. Indeed, can the spacing (*espacement*) constitutive of ethics signify otherwise than as a translation of the ontico-phenomenological categories of being? And does Levinas' continual recourse to the language of intentionality (the analyses of *Totality and Infinity* are stratified in consonance with the basic principles of Husserlian phenomenology) not quite literally fly in the face of the face he protracts?<sup>10</sup>

The import of Derrida's early critique of Levinas in 'Violence and Metaphysics,' to which we have alluded at intervals, is sound. However, the critique advanced by Derrida is directed, primarily, against the analyses of *Totality and Infinity* and the cluster of essays immediately predating this work. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, partly in response to the Derridean critique (although Derrida's influence must not be exaggerated), breaks decisively with the language of presence. The face is no longer epitomized by its exorbitance. The figures of excess (*excès*) and superfluity (*débordement*) no longer render it intelligible. The face is

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<sup>10</sup> The 'principal' thesis of *Totality and Infinity* 'is that the noesis-noema structure is not the primordial structure of intentionality' (TI 294). Levinas, as noted, is engaged in a re-enactment of the 'primordial' vis-à-vis the signification of the 'face.' However, the structuration of the relation with the face continues to be framed in terms of intentionality, albeit modified ethically as 'Desire.' This policy is revised in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, although, as I will argue, the 'face' Levinas describes is still delimited by concepts and figures that limit the range of what may legitimately signify as a face.



now defined in altogether more ambiguous terms, terms consonant with the amphibological subject 'created' through exposure to it. The face signifies as 'a failing of all presence' (*défaillance de toute présence*) and is 'less than a phenomenon [*moins qu'un phénomène*]' (OBBE 90; AE 145). The excess of presence that had marked the 'appearance' of the face in *Totality and Infinity* is rethought in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* under the heading of desertion. The advent of the Other is a withdrawal from the space of the world rather than a visitation. The face is thus a 'poverty that hides its wretchedness' (OBBE 90) and not a praeternatural epiphany manifesting itself superabundantly.

Derrida's pronouncement (somewhat vaticinal in tone, perhaps) that 'no philosophical language will ever be able to reduce the naturalness of a spatial praxis in language' (Derrida, 1978, 113) is thus only partly vindicated. For Levinas does indeed reduce the 'said' (*Dit*) of systematicity and exposition to the 'saying' (*Dire*) of exposure and expropriation, an event (*événement*), or veritable *Enteignis*, in contradistinction to the appropriative event, or *Ereignis*, propounded by Heidegger. The ethical reductions Levinas performs in *Otherwise than Being*, for he implements a series of such reductions, deflect critical attention from the face, in its plenitudinous 'presence,' to the nudity (*nudité*) of the face. This move – a recantation of Levinas' position in *Totality and Infinity*, or rather a deepening of it – re-frames the encounter with the face as an encounter with the 'trace' (qua irretrievable absence) of one who has already passed by. The rectitude (*droiture*), or 'uprightness,' of the face is re-envisioned as the 'unrightness' of the trace 'which undoes absolutely' any correlation between the signified and its signification (TRA 335). The naturalness of language, as highlighted by Derrida, no longer ossifies the Other, who presents 'himself' to the phenomenological regard *in propria persona*, or in 'flesh and bone' (*leibhaft gegeben*), because the distanciation characteristic of conversant beings interrupts the grammar of spatialisation as it is conventionally understood. Levinas thus transposes the locus of encounter from the site of the philosophical λόγος to the τόπος of the 'ethical body' (*corps éthique*). An ethical body which one might also term the *corps impropre* (in opposition to the *corps propre* defended by Merleau-Ponty); a 'body' whose propriety Levinas has cause to question for he discovers the remnants of an 'I think' in the 'I can' of corporeity.

The 'naturalness' vaunted above by Derrida in 'Violence and Metaphysics,' is itself pre-articulated by the naturalism (or rather the contra-naturalism (AB 43)) of



susception. The body, ethically rethought as the pathetical body – the human qua *homo expositus* – is thus itself the ‘organ of transcendence’ (IS 149). Language is enfleshed as ‘saying.’ However, incarnation is not the ‘primary fact of language,’ Levinas will insist. Language cannot be ‘assimilated to activity’ – it is not a ‘prolongation of thought in corporeity’ (TI 205) – because the exposedness Levinas describes is defined by its extreme passivity. Thus, matter itself ‘conceals a materiality more material than all matter’ (OBBE 108), he argues. The dimension of depth (viz., *extériorité*) in which the face opens in *Totality and Infinity* is thus concretised, further radicalizing the ‘radical empiricism [*empirisme radical*],’ Levinas practices (Tel 213; TI 196), as the ‘dimension’ of ‘susceptibility’ in which matter is embodied (OBBE 108). The phenomenal field, centred upon the kinaesthetic body and radiating outward from an axial *Ichpol*, is subtended by the more primordial field of ethics (*champs éthique*), in which the subject does not so much ‘hold sway’ constitutionally, as support the others for whom it is uniquely responsible.

Although exteriority is ‘produced’ in a ‘subjective field’ for the separated being’ (TI 299), such production admits of volitional activity. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, therefore, Levinas strives to emphasize the fact that the ‘separate’ being of the existent is itself engendered through exposure to the Other. The field within which this *relation sans relation* is produced is an-archic. It substructs the ἀρχή and the autarky of the pure Ego (*reines Ich*). Thus, it appears, as Howard Caygill observes, that it is ‘the movement of orientation rather than the relation of the I and the Other that is the locus of transcendence’ in Levinas’ thought (Caygill, 2002, 101). The field in which the difficult frisson between the self and the Other is dramatized attains a ‘methodological’ primacy in Levinas’ work. Ethical space is diachronic, therefore, for the ego(s) appraised by phenomenology arise within it. Ethical space is diatopical, for the discrete τόποι of ‘self’ and ‘Other’ are the terms between which the ‘happening’ (*événement*) it details transpires. This spacing (*espacement*) is effectuated, *in concreto*, as the susceptibility of the flesh. The body is the site where the other person is borne (as indicated it is the site of ethical portage) and the place where I am created. It is, thus, not so much that the Other and the I arise within this space, rather the Other and the ‘I’ are born(e) there.

The face, qua ethically reconfigured *Urimpression*, is already in ‘me’ – it is borne by ‘me’ (as I am *born* through exposure to it) – so much so that the motif of

interpenetration, somewhat implicit in *Totality and Infinity*, is rendered explicit (i.e., as animation) in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, forming the centrepiece of Levinas' account of sensibility. It is as if, Levinas professes, 'the face of the other, although invisible, continued my own face' (AGCW 168). The flesh is the site of confusion (not fusion, Levinas will hasten to add), the rational and the sensible are immediately bound to one another. The one who commands is already in me. My near-sphere (*Nahsphäre*) is, as it were, occupied by another, another who takes up residence at the heart of my being, coring me out, or everting me, and connecting me to a 'plot' outside the privileged order of truth and being – the preferred terms, Levinas believes, in phenomenological and ontological explications of subjectivity. Thus, the inside-outside structuration of space, already depreciated somewhat in *Totality and Infinity* (the existent, we recall, is 'simultaneously without and within the world,' going forth 'outside from an inwardness' (TI 152)), becomes altogether otiose in *Otherwise than Being*, where space is concretized as place, and place, at once 'locus and non-lieu' (OBBE 45), is rethought, and literally reanimated qua body, as the susception of matter. Quite how, and indeed if, such 'transcendental sensualism,' as Drabinski terms it (Drabinski, 2001, 126), coheres with the 'ultramateriality' (TI 256) in which the 'voluptuous' is announced in *Totality and Infinity*, is debatable. Certainly, for Levinas, my exposure to myself, auto-affectivity as such, is, one might say, simply my being affected by the spacing (*Kedousha*) of ethical space itself, the distance that separates me from the Other I bear. To some extent, then, for Levinas auto-affectivity is separation (*séparation*).

### § 9. *The facile itinerary of theological thought*

The natural (or contra-natural) supernaturalism of the face-to-face relation, which we have begun to detail above, is revealed as the idea of the infinite in me, such revelation abrogating all natural religion, Levinas contends (TI 62). Yet the religion of ligation Levinas expounds is a religion seemingly bereft of the lineaments of ritual and superstition (although not itself without dogmatism, I would maintain) and therefore arguably very much a natural 'religion,' a religion of gestation, natality, and maternity, but one devoid of any theology drawn from the *Liber naturae*, a book toward which *me voici* apparently pays little heed; although, according to Levinas, the human being is *zum-Buch-Sein*, that is, 'being-toward-the-book,' the ambiance of

the Bible and its 'inspired Word' being as basic to human existence as 'houses' and 'clothing,' he avers (*PJL* 109).

The 'stench of the numinous,' Levinas will argue, lingers about any 'religion' that aspires to represent the 'infinite' in the form of an 'object' amenable to cognition (*TI* 195). (Can Levinas be certain that the 'God' he invokes is not equally odiferous one may wonder?) The 'distance of transcendence,' however, the distance that separates the idea of infinity from its ideatum, 'constitutes' the very 'content' of this ideatum itself (*TI* 49). Transcendence here, is not commensurable with the transcendency that separates the object of a noetic act from the act in which it is given. Such objectivity, and the process of distantiation through which it is given, are contingent upon the suspension of the ontic validity of the object under surveillance. Such 'suspension,' Levinas argues, already predisposes the 'object' to possession and hence containment within thought (*TI* 49). The properly transcendent 'cannot be encompassed,' however (*TI* 293). Precisely how the transcendent is managed by Levinas, and the propriety of its transcendence shielded from those forces, and entities, that might sully it, is something to which we must be attentive as our analysis proceeds. Levinas' phenomenology of religion, if, indeed, his assault on the religious can be classified as phenomenological, is highly problematic. It will be the task of part three of the present work to evaluate this aspect of Levinas' thought.

The 'ethical plane' (*TI* 201) 'pre-exists' the field of pure consciousness, extending the phenomenological excavation of sense, and the archaeological imperative which impels the discipline, a stage (*étape*) below that explicated by Husserl (some would regard this very manoeuvre as an *evacuation* rather than an *excavation* of 'sense').<sup>11</sup> For Husserl, the 'exclusion of Nature' was the 'methodic means' for 'initially making possible the turning of regard to transcendently pure consciousness' (*Id* §56). All 'axiological and practical functionings of consciousness,' Husserl proposes, 'undergo exclusion' together with 'all natural sciences and cultural sciences,' for these scientific domains are infected with a desperate methodological naivety that requires refinement. The science of origins championed by Husserl restricts itself to the field of pure consciousness 'where sense is bestowed.' This 'sphere of being of absolute origins' (*Id* §55), this post reduction

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<sup>11</sup> As Levinas makes clear in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* this movement *vers le concret* is best thought of as an an-archaeological imperative (*OBBE* 7) to avoid lapsing back into the idioticon of 'constitution' and 'intentionality.'

residuum, is the locus of meaning for Husserl. In concert with this basic Husserlian operation Levinas parenthesizes 'natural' religion, deeming it naïve and dogmatic, in a way not dissimilar to Husserl's exclusion of the sciences of the natural attitude from the remit of phenomenological consideration. Ultimately, all positive religions – and not merely pantheistic expressions of religiosity and *Naturphilosophie* – are to be suspended (TI 23; OBBE 147). Levinas reduces 'dogmatic' religion (so the story goes) in order to probe its proto-ethical substratum. Religiosity is 'naïve' to the extent that it remains preoccupied with the externalia of liturgy, ritual and cult, failing to divine its true orientation as ethics. Such an orientation is revealed, to what one can only describe as an ethical intuition (*Anschauung*), within the 'field' 'magnetized' by the 'particular and the personal,' in which, Levinas claims, the 'production of infinity is enacted' (TI 26).

Despite such indictments, which would appear to be in broad concinnity with the methodological criteria to which phenomenology subscribes (except that Levinas does not suspend his own *Voraussetzungslos* regarding the status of positive religions other than Judaism), Levinas refuses to 'parenthesize' what Husserl calls the 'transcendence pertaining to God' (*Id* §58). Where Husserl avails himself of nothing (so the story goes<sup>12</sup>) that cannot be rendered 'essentially evident' (*Id* §59), the 'existence' of 'God' being precisely countersensical to phenomenological inquiry (the question of 'God' thus remains excluded from the 'field of research' conducted by Husserl, limiting itself, as it does, to the 'field of pure consciousness' (*Id* §58)), Levinas retains the term, employing it liberally (much to the chagrin of many commentators) throughout his work. Levinas cannot suspend this term because the programme of suspension executed by phenomenology is itself suspended, he will claim, by the disruptive event marked (qua trace) by the withdrawal of the Other from the sphere of noetic activity. The 'interested effort of brute being persevering in being' is thereby 'suspended' he claims (*OUJ* 229).

But why retain the word 'God,' especially given the term's dubious semantic history, and granted that the orientation of sense is purportedly an orientation devoid of theological impedimenta? Why indeed, unless one either wishes to revive philosophical conceptualizations of 'God' (vis-à-vis Plato,

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<sup>12</sup> Arguably, such an interpretation of Husserl (together with the aforementioned 'claim' that Levinas performs a reduction of 'religion' in its more doctrinaire manifestations), is nothing more, perhaps, than what Heidegger would call, a 'nursery story' one finds in the annals of the 'usual histories of philosophy' (Heidegger, 1984, 76).

Descartes, and Kant) reanimating them with the interpretative ‘breath’ of an exegetical method honed through earnest study of the Talmud. Or, unless one is intent upon arguing that the ‘God’ announced by theology does not name a divine being (nor a ‘God’ beyond being), so much as it directs attention to the only locus that might genuinely warrant such an appellation, namely the face of the other person. However, why, if ‘divinity keeps its distances’ (TI 297), as Levinas himself commends, does Levinas not keep his distance from ‘God’ and all things divine (θεῖον)? Could it be that Levinas himself succumbs to what he himself would call the ‘facile itinerary’ (*itinéraire facile*) of ‘pious thought’ (*pensée pieuse*), deducing ‘theological realities’ (*réalités théologiques*) where there are, in fact, none (LP 124; LEP 234)?

The status of ‘God’ within Levinas’ ‘philosophy’ is moot. Certainly, the word itself is no abraxas (although Levinas will refer to it variously, as the ‘apex of vocabulary’ (OBBE 156), and the absolute ‘value,’ or ‘saying,’ prior to the apophantic λόγος (HA 136)). Levinas famously abhors mysticism and derides ecstatic forms of religious experience, disclaiming them as the mere juvenilia of human development. For a thinker so resolutely anti-Hegelian as Levinas such denouncements, as I hope to demonstrate proximately, are problematic. If, during the course of his writings, Levinas’ presentation of the proto-ethical structuration of sense degenerates into some kind of appraisal of religious topoi in which this structuration either is, or is not, evidenced, then his credentials as phenomenologist suffer further defamation. It is flagrantly anti-phenomenological, I would argue, to evaluate modalities of ‘religious’ consciousness in this rather derogatory way. Levinas does not engage in a comparative study of religion, nor does he conduct his passing surveys of religious phenomena with anything like the rigour of scholars such as Brede Kristensen and Geraardus Van der Leeuw.<sup>13</sup> It may be, as Levinas notes, that in the thought of Heidegger ‘the monotheist revelation is always expedited in a few unnuanced theological formulas,’ and, as such, does not merit the ‘subtle hermeneutics’ Heidegger reserves for the truths of Hellenism (PV 138). However, is Levinas’ treatment of the ‘pagan’ not equally unnuanced, one may wonder? Ought one, then, to take seriously Levinas’ own use of the word ‘God’? Are we to presume

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Van der Leeuw’s *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. J. Turner (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1938); and Kristensen’s *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, trans. J. Carman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968).



that the derogation of the 'pagan,' the 'numinous,' and the 'mystical' within Levinas' work – which after all encompass myriad phenomena within innumerable religious traditions – is simply some form of coded rhetoric conducted post ethical reduction? Are we to presume that these designata name distinct structural forms of religion, and that the monotheism, Levinas defends, is ethically derived and not onto-theological? How radical is the empiricism Levinas practises given the ease with which he dismisses such variegated and disparate phenomena?

The approbation with which Levinas' thought is greeted within certain quarters of the academic community is due in part, I would argue, to its amenability to theological exploitation. Janicaud's critique of Levinas, as much an admonishment of certain strands within contemporary phenomenology as a critique of Levinas' work, remains pertinent, therefore, despite Janicaud's own somewhat cursory reading of Levinas' texts. Levinas' thought is often harnessed to ill effect by Jewish and Christian apologists alike. His work is appropriated, and its insights culled, in order, it appears, to justify the theological primacy of 'positive' religious traditions. A second breed of apologist, engaged in a more covert theological operation, praises Levinas as the pioneer of post-theological religiosity. This curious religion without religion bears all the hallmarks of an ethically modified Protestantism, channelled for good measure, through a hearty dose of Danish morosity, apropos of Kierkegaard.

In themselves these currents of thought are innocuous. But their progenitors adopt, typically quite naively (this term is intended here in its full phenomenological determination) Levinas' own highly idiosyncratic understanding of God, an understanding undoubtedly coloured by Judaic, and more specifically Mitnagdic, conceptualizations of the divine. The result being, that much of what passes for the burgeoning discipline of 'continental' philosophy, certainly within the context of the United Kingdom and parts of North America, is hindered by the same prejudicial modes of thought that arguably impede Levinas' own thinking. Can one really engage with phenomenology, engaging with it on its own terms, and allow the radicality of its method to grip one, and yet fail to interrogate the posita of theological commitment?

For Purcell, the (d)alliance between phenomenology and theology has been naively understood. More often than not, commentators on Levinas' work operate with an 'undifferentiated understanding of theology,' Purcell suggests (Purcell, 2003, 472). This inevitably leads such commentators to exaggerate the 'phenomenological-

theological smudge' that characterizes Levinas' thinking. By failing to distinguish between 'fundamental,' 'dogmatic,' and 'systematic' forms of theology, critics of Levinas' (as well as apologists) have conflated the latter's 'philosophy of religion' with more overtly 'confessional' theological thought (Purcell, 2003, 470).

Arguably it is a theology that hones in upon the 'method, the structure, and the dynamic of theological response,' that is the 'initial point of theological engagement with Levinas' thought,' Purcell urges. However, if Levinas' work, as Purcell intimates, contributes the possibility of a 'new theological *Denkform*' a theology that remains attentive to the 'changing dynamic of the human situation,' that is, a 'responsible and responsive' form of theological thinking, then is theology not called upon to evaluate the probity of its kerygma and the doctrinal *Ideenkleid* in which it is set forth? Indeed, as Purcell notes, theology is 'relative to the summons and challenge of the ethical encounter,' relative, one might say, to 'human experience,' particularly those experiences 'at the limits of ecstasy and misery.' Theology is then, one might say, stationed *in limine*, on the threshold of liminal experiences, and, as such, Purcell maintains, 'betokens a certain openness to what is other' (Purcell, 2003, 470).

But what, one may ask, and here we rejoin Levinas, is the relationship between the theology accented by Purcell here, and its more dogmatic counterpart? What kind of transit takes place between these two modalities of theological thought? Is the openness to 'what is other,' that is, after all, integral to theology, one would think, sufficiently commodious to accommodate articulations of liminality and ultimacy in human experience that do not conform to its determinations of meaningfulness? Does theology purport to be universal in extent, in which case it seeks to advance a theology of 'religion,' or does it restrict its activity to elucidating the fundamentals of the human existential predicament? Should the latter be the case, then theology can claim to be nothing more than a species of 'regional' anthropology.

If theology is to take its ideational bearings from the thought of Levinas, however, and endeavour to describe the proto-theological substrates of experience, then the principia to which it must duly adhere are the face of the other person and the mandate of justice demanded by the third party. These principia, in turn, do not guarantee theology safe passage, nor promise it return to the 'hearth' of doctrinal repose. A thought homeward or regressive in orientation is inimical, one must

suppose, to the spirit of Levinasian philosophy. If theology is to remain true to the peregrinate character of Levinasian thought (a thought that promises to both describe and enact the ‘movement of the Same toward the Other which never returns to the Same’ (MS 49)), then it must risk the dissolution of its allegiance with dogmatic theology. It must risk, therefore, its traditional comportment as theology and open itself, qua discipline or science, to constant renewal under the ordinance of the principles it serves, namely justice and the face. Thus, one must either reconfigure theology (whether it be ‘Christian’ or ‘Jewish’) in accordance with Levinasian directives, in which case one must be careful not to accept uncritically the positings Levinas freely grants himself (the determinants of ‘justice’ and the ‘face’ are indigenous to a certain context: what commands as face, and what discloses itself as just, cannot be divorced from the conceptual and axiological horizons against which they signify. It is this context that gives rise to, or creates a place for (*donne lieu*), notions of this sort). Or, one must be prepared to render theology innominate, a science awaiting its designation; in which case what has traditionally passed for theological thought is in need of destructureation by the ethical imperative that regulates Levinas’ work. Theology is thereby de-theologized in the name of justice, a process of de-theologization that continues the work of ‘demythification’ initiated by Levinas’ programme of philosophy. A process, what is more, in which theology qua θεωρία – theology as a codified system of beliefs behind which one can retrench – is suspended, and superseded genealogically, by the discipline of ethical deaconship (*diaconie*). First philosophy is therefore not theology (θεολογική) – how could it be, given that what Levinas calls ‘theological recuperation’ proceeds the ‘order of holiness, which is primary’ (GCM ix) – but ethics (ἠθική).

If, as Purcell argues, Levinas’ provides a ‘prolegomena or propaedeutic to any proper understanding of religion on the basis of phenomenological analysis’ (Purcell, 2003, 475), then surely one must inquire as to who, or what, determines the propriety according to which such ‘understanding’ is measured. Might such propriety not, in fact, turn out to be solecistic? For it is neither self-evident nor, furthermore, unproblematic, as to what exactly constitutes ‘religion’ or defines ‘religiosity.’ Do readers of Levinas’ work not, to adapt Purcell’s own observation concerning theology, *operate with an undifferentiated understanding of religion*? Might one not need, therefore, to speak of the plural fold of religion, in a manner not entirely dissimilar to the way in which Levinas will allude to ‘theologies,’ in the plural, to

limit the ‘dogmatic pretension,’ within his thought, which the word ‘theology’ might harbour (*BV* xiv)? Moreover, even if one accepts Levinas’ (post-reduction) designation of religion as ‘liturgy’ or ‘work’ (*MS* 50), it is still not clear why a phenomenological analysis of religion ought to arrive at the same conclusions as Levinas. Unless, that is, it is a phenomenology guided by directives in consonance with the principia (ἀρχαί) to which Levinas subscribes, a phenomenology bound, therefore, to the fundamentals of a certain Hebraism. By ‘positive’ religion, as we will discover in due course, Levinas means principally the religions of the ‘Book.’ One’s being-toward-the-Book, or *zum-Buch-sein* (*PJL* 109), an ‘orientation,’ for Levinas, as basic as any we will recall, is therefore not, as one might have hoped, simply a reference to the innate textuality of experience, or the narrational character of interpretative acts, but a direct accession to the scriptures comprising the Bible.

If, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, phenomenology strives ‘to give a direct description of our experience as it is’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, vii), then such concessions are highly suspect. The reader of Levinas is thus, I believe, forced to decide between one of two plausible interpretations of his work. Either, one agrees that Levinas’ thought is an amalgam of Jewish (and more pointedly Mitnagdic) wisdom and phenomenological philosophy. His deductions are, therefore, adequate to his ‘experience’ (they are local to his topological situation) serving as powerful indictments against barbarism of all kinds, yet they do not cohere with the descripta of phenomenology in its ‘classical’ Husserlian form. Or, one reads Levinas work as a challenge to the autarky and imperious nature of philosophical, and hence phenomenological, thinking. A thinking, as Levinas would have it, that is sufficient unto itself – a thinking that thinks what is outside itself while remaining immanent to itself – a thinking that would make of what is other and exterior to it the possession and property of thought (*D* 138). On this reading, phenomenology permits itself the self-evidence of its own universality, a freedom Levinas contests, and fails to acknowledge its place among the wisdom of the ‘Nations.’ However, if phenomenology is a method or style of thinking, as Levinas contends, is it not suited as much to excavating the ground of the kinds of ‘experiences’ illuminated in the Bible, as it is to fortifying the standing of philosophical science against the onslaught of naturalistic interpretations of the world? Perhaps it is a question of attestation, of witness, or testimony, therefore?

Further consideration of the themata engaged above must be postponed until part three. In order for the criticism I have begun to advance here to be substantiated appropriately, Levinas reconstitution of the 'settings' within which 'God' is 'staged' for consciousness, or within which God 'comes to mind' (*vient à l'idée*) require closer examination (*GCM* xiv; emphasis added). I will suggest that the stage to which Levinas repeatedly alludes, the stage, or staging, that is set for the upsurge of 'God,' is a product of generative constitution, that is, of heritability (and is thus relative to a certain γένος and a certain πολιτεία). What 'arises' within symbological space as 'God,' cannot be exempted from the compass of constitution. The encounter with the Other, and, consequently, the encounter with that other who alights across the face of the human other in the figure of an irretrievable absence, takes place on the cusp of such constitutional activity; and it is there that reflection must position itself if it is to grasp the significance of this 'term' in its determination as that which *orients* sense (*sens*) within the work of Levinas.

To return to our consideration of height (*hauteur*), Levinas will argue, against Husserl, that the dimension of height from which the invocation of the face proceeds, 'introduces sense into being' (*MS* 57). This sense places 'constitutive freedom' into question (*TI* 206) and dislodges the ego from its position of pre-eminence. As Levinas explains, 'height':

Is already *lived across* the experience of the human body. It leads human societies to raise up altars. It is not because men, through their bodies, have an experience of the vertical that *the human is placed under the sign of height*; because *being is ordained to height*, the human body is *placed in a space* in which the high and the low are distinguished and the sky is discovered...(*MS* 57)

The juxtaposition of liturgy and ethics is purposeful here. Levinas contrasts the two in order to evidence the sublation of the former within the latter. Liturgy (λειτουργία), ethically transfigured and awarded its proper designation, is the 'putting out of funds at a loss' (*MS* 50), Levinas opines, what we might call pure largition. Morality may or may not be first philosophy. It seems, however, that 'religion,' in its ceremonial and ritualistic manifestations, is subordinate to the face-to-face relation. Furthermore, 'religion,' accomplished concretely as morality, is 'the ultimate structure' (*TI* 80), for it is produced as the intrigue of the interhuman. The lived body (*Leib*) takes its bearings from the face of the Other, and not primarily from the calibrations of the kinaestheses and the sensory fields they orient. The



kinaestheses are themselves susceptible to ethical animation. However, might this structure, as it is presented by Levinas, not require de-structuration? Does the 'ceremonial,' in which the 'said' of Levinas' own philosophy delights (*TI* 30), do justice to the phenomenon and phenomena of 'religion' itself? And is this thought, which prides itself upon its apparent sobriety, not guilty of concealing a corybantic enthusiasm for regulation and law, even if the legality of the face is underwritten by the equality of the third party?

If, as Levinas confers above, being is 'ordained' to height, it becomes a matter of some importance to ascertain whether the ordination in question issues from a 'divine' source and whether, as Jean-Luc Nancy confers, one can avoid the 'dual temptation' to either 'baptize with the name "god" all the obscure confines of our experience (or our thought),' or 'on the contrary to denounce such baptism as superstitious metaphor' (Nancy, 1991, 142). Now, 'being,' Levinas argues, 'is surpassed' in the relation with the Other (*TI* 302). Let us be clear, according to a conception of the 'world' in which the world is that which is secured for thought – the point of an accord between the concept (*Begriff*) and what it grasps – the Other is transmundane, rather than extra-terrestrial. Moreover, the 'primordial production of being' (*TI* 305; emphasis added) is generated in the face-to-face encounter. Surely then, 'God' is superfluous to such dramatization? Is 'God' not literally surpassed, or passed over, in the *recto verso* of the face-to-face relation? The Other, Levinas will insist, 'is not the incarnation of God,' although through his 'face,' a face in which the Other is himself 'disincarnate,' the dimension of height in which 'God' is 'revealed' is opened (*TI* 79). Is 'God' not, perhaps, a metonym for what Levinas calls the 'marvel of exteriority' (*TI* 292)? A marvel (*merveille*) before which one does not genuflect in adoration, for one already finds oneself addressed *from on high* (*mi-elyon*), much in the way Dasein finds itself to be thrown into the world, nor recoil tremulously as if before a hierophany, but a marvel toward which one turns to offer up one's very self? It may be precisely this *merveille* that summons one to *reveiller*, or awaken, to God's passing, a passing not itself without ambiguity. For 'God' may simply have passed, in which case the 'wakefulness' (*veille*) of moral conscience is at once a 'wake' marking God's demise (or the trail of Dasein's *Geschichtlichkeit*), or 'God' may have passed by into immemoriality, thus indicating that the face is less the vestige of one who has expired, than the 'trace' of one who may be (*`ehyeh*

`asher `ehyeh),<sup>14</sup> or rather one who might have been, so utterly does this ‘God’ transcend the present time of representation and synthesis. Of course, one could argue that the face surpasses God as it surpasses Being. The face, thereby, commemorates God’s passing (the inscription it bears is thus an epitaph to mark the death of a ‘certain God’ (*OBBE* 185), a God as much behind the ethical *mise-en-scène* Levinas describes, I would argue, as the god (θεός) he discerns skulking in the shadows of Western Philosophy) as an ethically reworked Passover or *Pesach*. The suffering of the stranger who faces me testifies to the suffering of all strangers (and not simply those exiled in Egypt under the Pharaoh). The *matzah* of the Seder meal is thus transposed out with its traditional ritual confines – akin to the way in which the Jewish ‘daily prayer replaces the sacrifices in the Temple according to Jewish theology’ (*WSNP* 226) – and reconfigured as the bread from one’s mouth freely given to the Other (*OBBE* 64); a Levinasian trope for the hard materialism of economic charity (*charité*) and the even harder martyrdom of substitution, a gesture, what is more, that does not merely indicate the ‘coring out’ of sensory enjoyment, but the coring out (*dénucléation*) of ‘religion’ itself. A *dénucléation* that is at once the coring out of the ‘mythological’ and ‘theological’ pulp (*pulpe*) of religion. This may, of course, be an optimistic reading of Levinas and the matters raised above warrant further consideration.

In judging the dimension of elevation to be anterior to the performances of cult, the history of religion to which Levinas gives voice is at once both extraordinary and preposterous. It is extraordinary, because one cannot but be astounded by the hideous generality to which it commits itself (it fails to evidence its claims phenomenologically, falling back on stereotype rather than developing any rigorous typology of religion) and because the marvel of the interhuman dominates its focus. It is preposterous, because the primal scene it elucidates – the encounter with the face in its exteriority – breaks with the chronometry of linear time (whether this unfolds as so called ‘secular’ or ‘Holy’ history) and institutes the diachronic order of the pre-posterous – the *antérieure postérieurement*. Levinas promulgates a diachronic history of religion (a history of ligation he believes to fall outside the remit of the ‘fundamental historicity’ Merleau-Ponty proposes (*OBBE* 167)) insofar

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<sup>14</sup> This alternative rendering of *Exodus* 3:13 is suggested by Richard Kearney. See Kearney’s *The God Who May Be* (Kearney, 2001) for an attempt to develop this reading of *Exodus* further in relation to the thought of Levinas, Derrida and Heidegger.

as the involvement of God in that history (a history dedicated to enunciating the ‘pre-history of the ego’ (*OBBE* 117), thus the history of dedication itself (*GCM* xiv)) is not so much one of providence or teleological propulsion, as one of God’s being proved – put to the proof or *épreuve* – as the very suffering of those in exile from the world, hence those exiled from, and by, the form that would shelter them. Certainly, what Levinas terms the religiosity of the self (*religiosité de soi*), is the self’s putting itself at stake for-the-other, a movement older than the game of phenomenology and the principles it keeps endlessly in play. It appears, as Llewelyn intimates, that the very being of God in Levinas thought, is the ‘history’ of such suffering itself (Llewelyn, 1995, 210). Levinas does, to be sure, indicate as much when he suggests that it is as if ‘the history of Israel were the ‘divine comedy’ or the ‘divine ontology itself,’ as if, he continues, ‘the trials of the just’ were ‘a lived experience stronger than the death which denies it, a concrete experience or even the event of the divine eternity, belonging to the semiotics of the word God’ (*DJ* 6). This ‘suffering of suffering’ (*souffrance de la souffrance*), as Levinas will call it, is a suffering ‘for God’ who ‘suffers from my suffering’ (*OBBE* 196n.21; *AE* 186n.1; emphasis added). For Levinas, then, God is quite literally *implicated* at the heart of ethics.

The ‘above-below’ disposition (*TI* 297) – an aptitude which, Levinas asserts, is pre-eminently ethical in contradistinction to the ethical reserve he believes to characterize phenomenology – starts from the me and moves toward the Other. This movement towards the Other effects a transition between the interiority of domiciliary life and the exteriority of the ethical encounter. It is the ‘priority’ of this ‘orientation,’ rather than the dyadic terms between which it is engendered, that ‘summarizes’ the theses of *Totality and Infinity* (*TI* 215). The ‘between’ (*Zwischen*) of intersubjective ‘space’ is an orientation and not a structural component of consciousness. This orientation, which arises between the subject and the other (more precisely between the Other and me), is irreversible. Hence, the intervalic space of the face-to-face relation is, as Levinas repeatedly emphasizes, asymmetrical. As noted, it is the precise dimensions of this relational ‘space’ (*l’entre-les-deux*) that informs the critical debate between Levinas and his many interlocutors. I have engaged this debate, albeit only tangentially, in order to clarify the nature of the distinctly ethical space Levinas deduces. I wish now to indicate how the advent of the third party (*le tiers*) interrupts the ‘privacy’ of the face-to-face, adding a dimension of ‘breadth’ to that of the ‘verticality’ which marks the space of ethical

‘dramatization,’ and to examine why Levinas excludes the nonhuman creature from proto-ethical consideration.

### § 10. *The formative role of Mitnagdic Judaism*

Levinas’ disputation with Buber is perhaps summarized by the following statement from the essay ‘Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge’ (1958). Here, Levinas admonishes Buber for not taking ‘separation seriously’ (*BTK* 35). Buber, Levinas balks, ‘does not give expression to the movement, distinct from distancing and the relation, in which the I emerges from the self’ (*BTK* 35). The motive force behind such an omission, Levinas confers, is Buber’s ‘religious liberalism’ (Buber ‘never says the Torah but the teaching,’ Levinas laments (*MBCJ* 12)), which stands opposed to ‘religion’ in its dogmatic forms (*BTK* 29). The somewhat castigatory tone of these remarks indicates, I would argue, that the disputation between Buber and Levinas arises as much on ‘religious’ as it does on ‘philosophical’ grounds. Moreover, the contrariety of their two positions may be accounted for by intra-religious (or inter-denominational) differences within Judaism. Levinas’ Mitnagdic proclivities are in evidence once again here.

Indeed, Levinas’ Mitnagdic ‘orientation’ determines the thinking behind his own philosophy of orientation. So much so, that prephilosophical (confessional) experience regulates the metre of philosophical form in this instance. Regulation, in some measure, is operative, to a greater or lesser extent, in all philosophical activity that qualifies as such. Levinas’ Mitnagdism conditions his thought. This is no glib biographical aside. For Mitnagdic Judaism – a movement within Judaism given to strenuous study of the Talmud and characterised by its aversion to (literally its *opposition to*) Hasidism, itself a devotional strain of Judaism defined by its stress upon religious *hitlahawoet*, or enthusiasm – clearly informs his basic trust in the ‘rationality’ of Western intellectualism (*TI* xvii). The awakening to the Other is, after all, ‘a rationality of the spirit’ (*CW* 158) not to be confused, Levinas urges us, with any kind of enthusiasm (ἐνθουσιασμός) or unbridled ‘spiritual’ excess.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Levinas himself provides a potted account of the origins and central tenets of Mitnagdism in his essay, ‘“In the Image of God”, according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner’ (1978). Rabbi Elijah (1720–1797), the Gaon of Vilna, considered the popular movement of Hasidism (spreading throughout Eastern Europe during the eighteenth century) to be one that demanded ‘more fervour than knowledge,’ and that ‘denied Talmudic science and dialectic their primary place in Jewish religious life.’ Moreover, ‘by grouping communities around spiritual personalities with charismatic power’ the

The Mitnagedim, of Levinas' homeland Lithuania, promoted a 'sober' and 'intellectual Judaism' sustained by the discipline of study. Indeed, Talmudic study was lauded by them to such a degree that, as Roger Burggraeve notes, 'Jewish life' was itself experienced as 'study' (Burggraeve, 2002, 23). Combine this propensity for studiousness with a general antipathy toward 'mystical' experience and 'enthusiasm,' and one begins to appreciate the religious influences guiding and informing Levinas' thought. Levinas is ultimately disinclined toward Buber's thought because it is altogether too Hasidic for his own Mitnagdic sensibility. Buber is, of course, no *tsaddikim* (despite publishing numerous authoritative texts on Hasidism) and he consistently disqualifies 'mystical experience' as an impediment to the 'binding business of a life on the hard earth [*verbindliches Lebensgeschäft auf der harten Erde*]' (Buber, 1965, 27 [1947, 170]). Buber himself defines his dialogical philosophy as a 'raptureless perseverance in concreteness,' a 'situation,' he adds, 'mightier and truer than all ecstasies' (Buber, 1965, 25). So explicit is this dedication to 'concrete life' throughout Buber's work, that Levinas' reproof of Buber for promulgating a kind of 'angelic spiritualism' is far from apposite, if not entirely inapt. Can the 'genuine common life [*Gemeinschaft weissen*]' advocated by Buber and revealed to the 'situation' of 'anguish' (*Bangnis*) and 'expectation' (*Erwartung*), really be the 'pure spiritualism of friendship' (BTK 33) Levinas denounces it as? Clearly, Levinas contests both the 'genuineness' of this life in common, and the alleged concreteness (*Konkretheit*) of the 'life' Buber describes. In fact, this disagreement between Buber and Levinas concerning the nature and sense of concretion, must be understood in the light of Levinas' ongoing disputations with Husserl and Heidegger regarding the status of the 'primordial' and its constitution.

Levinas reproaches Buber for his 'formalism' (BTK 32), for the latter fails, he believes, to isolate the 'ethical elements of the I-Thou' relation from those pertaining to 'things' (BTK 29). Despite the 'twofold attitude' in which, according to Buber, human beings are disposed toward the world (the 'basic word' pairs 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' define these attitudes respectively (Buber, 1970, 53)), Levinas censures Buber for being 'too much the *artiste* in his relation to people' (BTK 33). In Buber,

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*Tsadikim* or 'miraculous Rabbis,' who 'did not refuse the adoration of the faithful,' changed 'the true relations between disciple and master,' which the Gaon believed to lie at the heart of Judaic life. The Gaon, Levinas continues, 'was the soul and the leader of these opponents – these *Mitnagedim*.' The Mitnagedim 'were suspicious of the sentimental mysticism of the new doctrine,' believing study of the Talmud to be the very 'life of the Torah itself,' the 'principle of creation,' the 'object of contemplative life' and the 'participation in the highest form of life' (IGRH 151-152).



Levinas asserts, the 'difference of level between the I and the Thou' is not sufficiently demarked (*BTK* 32). The dimension of height is absent from Buber's thought, thus the 'meeting' described by him is characterised by a reciprocity or symmetry between terms. Buber cannot account for the 'ethical inequality' in which the 'original diacony' (*AB* 44) of the face-to-face is conducted because, Levinas insists, he begins his philosophical programme by attending to the basic word (*Grundwort*) 'instead of reflecting on the *cogito*' in its separation (*AB* 41). Buber is unable to accord primacy to the 'Thou' (Levinas questions the familiarity of the I-Thou form (*AB* 44)), and hence subordinate the Same to the Other, because he postulates an ontological parity between dyads. The 'Between' (*Zwischen*), remains a 'mode of being,' or 'co-presence,' therefore, and does not break decisively with 'Totality' (*BMP* 23). In failing to break with 'Totality,' Buber's thought (or so Levinas opines) remains committed to the economy of the 'Same,' and thus remains committed to the ecology of the domicile (the λόγος of the οἶκος). Between the 'I' and the 'Thou' Levinas will insert a 'He.' The third-personal pronominal '*il*' of *illicité* presides over the encounter between the self and the Other. The other person stands in the trace of illeity. Illeity thus disturbs the intimacy of the I-Thou concord. Between 'us,' an 'unimpeachable' and 'severe witness' inserts himself, 'making public' our 'private clandestinity,' Levinas suggests (*ET* 33).

Buber's unabashed 'dendrophilia' perturbs Levinas, and is a far cry from the temperate (and more 'classically' phenomenological) description of a tree Husserl sets forth in the first volume of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology* (*Ideas* §§88-89 [181-185]):

The tree rather than serving me or dissolving into representation, can face me in person, speak to me and elicit a response [...] For Buber, the presentation of the thing as person breaks away from representation, and binds me (*BTK* 30).<sup>16</sup>

To include the tree within the ambit of what may face one, to include the plant (or animal) within the ligature of religion, is a move Levinas resists. Like Socrates, who in the *Phaedrus*, laments that 'trees will not teach me anything' (Plato, 1900, 230), the tree, according to Levinas, does not instruct one ethically, nor summon one with

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<sup>16</sup> Buber is, one must add, no panpsychist. The 'tree' with which Buber is 'drawn into a relation,' the 'tree' which 'ceases to be an It' and which 'confronts' Buber 'bodily,' is no 'dryad'. Buber concedes that he neither 'experiences' the tree as 'conscious,' nor as in possession of a 'soul.' Such admissions do not prohibit the tree from being encountered as a tree, however (Buber, 1970, 58).

the force of an imperative. The height, or difference in 'level' (*niveau*), that extends between the 'Same' and the 'Other' similarly demarcates, it seems, the domain of the human from that of the nonhuman creature. Buber's presentation of the I-Thou relation is inadequate, therefore, because the structure he deduces is, broadly speaking, 'animistic' (*BTK* 33) and, as such, is commensurate with the pre-logical structure of 'participation' Lévy-Bruhl discerns amongst so called 'primitive' peoples. The ethical *déstructure*, by contrast, is ethical because it separates the terms it defines in no uncertain manner, one from the other. Such separation (*séparation*) is at once a form of 'desacralization,' that is, an attempt to 'separate the true from appearance,' to '*separate* the true from the appearance essentially mixed with the true' (*DD* 141). Ethical space, unlike the 'relation' described by Buber, is thus pure, for it is untainted by the admixture of species-being, and liberated from the stipulations of τὰ ἔξω (or so Levinas will have his readers believe).

The role of desacralization in Levinas' thought, and his recurrent deployment of the themes of 'demythicization' and 'demythologization,' is central to an understanding of his work, and these notions are typically overlooked by Levinas' readers for reasons we will need to consider. Arguably, the *work* of Levinasian first philosophy (*philosophie première*) is disenchantment, I would contend. In part three we will examine these themes in some detail and assess their impact upon the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy, Levinas recounts. It is clear, however, that elements of Buber's thought appear almost infantile to Levinas, advanced, as they are, in what Levinas calls, an 'intermittently spiritualist and edifying language' (*BTK* 33). Moreover, these aspects of Buber's thought represent the 'most dated elements of a work otherwise so rich' (*BTK* 33), Levinas bemoans. But why is Buber's work deemed to be retrograde in some respects? Levinas does, after all, praise Buber for not conflating the 'sacred' with the 'divine' (*MBCJ* 18), a distinction upon which Levinas will repeatedly insist and upon which his project is founded – Levinas' *idée fixe par excellence*.

Principally, then, Buber is at fault, one might say, because his 'thou saying' remains an 'aim,' rather than an 'allegiance to the invisible' (*BMP* 34), and because the between (*Zwischen*) he details is made manifest *in* consciousness (*BTK* 33). The face is invisible where the thing presents itself *in simpliciter*, qua façade, to the gaze. This 'allegiance' accomplishes the ligature that binds the terms of Levinas' 'religion.' Buber's 'Thou' has 'no borders' (*Du grenzt nicht*) (Buber, 1970, 55 [1947,

16]), however, and while Levinas welcomes the primacy accorded to transcendence in Buber's philosophical anthropology, he will not condone its unqualified presentation. Transcendence must be 'qualified by the dimension of height or lowliness' (BTK 29), he confirms, and this pertains, furthermore, without transcendence 'becoming a relation with a content and dogmas' (BTK 29). Of course, as I have, I hope, demonstrated, Levinas' management of the field of ethics (*champs éthique*), and his fastidious regulation of the circumstances of its production, are themselves peremptory. The qualification of ethical space as 'height,' and the invariable consignment of 'height' to the dimension of the interhuman alone, impose a predetermined form upon the vicissitudes of the drama permitted to unfold there. This indicates, once again, that the governing logic of ethical space adheres to the law of confluence in which the complex lineage of Levinas' philosophical heredity culminates.

Buber concedes that 'things' can belong to the I-Thou relation. Yet the 'interhuman relation,' Levinas notes, once a 'Thou has a face,' is not only 'privileged' but 'conditions' all other relations (BTK 31). Now, Levinas' appraisal of Buber is undoubtedly correct on this occasion. One must inquire, therefore, as to why Levinas is himself unwilling to grant the face a wider application, or, minimally, to consider the nonhuman under the heading of the 'third party' (*le tiers*). Why is the human being the 'only being that one can be tempted to kill [*le seul être qu'on peut être tenté de tuer*],' one may legitimately wonder (ES 8; EtES 21). This question is clearly topical in an age blighted by the despoliation of its natural environments, and confronted by the predicament of countless species of animals and plants dwindling on the brink of extinction. The status of the nonhuman in Levinas' work is confounded further by his conflation of the Biblical edicts 'Thou shalt not commit murder' and 'Thou shalt not kill.' Levinas employs both indiscriminately, frequently interchanging between *meurtrir* and *tuer*, despite the fact that Deuteronomic law typically restricts the application of murder to the human other, whereas the injunction not to kill would appear to admit of wider application, thus extending to encompass whatever might perish or die, hence animals, plants, fish, etc. (Llewelyn, 1991, 245).

Now, by vacillating between such dicta, Levinas undermines the authority of his claim for the heteronomy of the human face because he treats murder and killing as synonymous. The former, needless to say, exhibits a quasi-juridical or

legalistic sense, that the latter typically does not, a sense, moreover, enforced through the framework of the law (and upheld by crown and Sanhedrin alike) and legislated for constitutionally. The Hebrew word *ràсах*, which connotes ‘murder,’ has a much more precise jurisdiction than the equivalent Hebrew words for killing, *hàrag* and *hèmît*, Llewelyn informs us (Llewelyn, 1991, 61). Murder is confined to cases of homicide. It does not apply, more generally, to biocide, therefore – a legal distinction to which prosecutors of both religious and secular law are likely to consent.<sup>17</sup>

To be sure, qua phenomenologist Levinas does not commit to adhere to the juridical constraints of Deuteronomic legalism. His conflation of murder and killing, and consequent failure to differentiate sufficiently between them, might thus be seen as an attempt to reinforce his basic conviction that my being for-the-other is proto-juridical, extra-territorial and therefore quite beyond the State. Responsibility precedes (the) law, and obligation precedes the event of Sinai (Derrida, 1999, 65). Certainly, qua *meforesh*, or expounder, of religious and philosophical texts, Levinas is not afraid to read against the grain of orthodox interpretation. Levinas’ Talmudic readings are notable in that they are not characterized by exegetical reserve (with the exception, perhaps, of his pronouncements regarding the status of women in Judaism, where he simply recycles traditional Jewish gender roles, and his deplorable treatment of the ‘pagan’). This exegetical bravura only serves to frustrate matters further, however. For Levinas’ standing as *meforesh*, and his subsequent relaxation of the distinction between *ràсах* and *hàrag* (a relaxation ultimately condoned because it enables Levinas to underscore the injunctive authority of the face as that which signifies prior to and beyond the law) ought, or so one might have hoped, to have rendered him less likely to have perpetuated the distinction between *ràсах* and *hàrag* his confounding of these terms permits him to overcome. Instead, Levinas simply reinstates this distinction, heightening the charge of its polarity, and reintroduces it as the difference between ‘face’ and ‘form,’ or ‘face’ and ‘façade,’ upon which his programme of demythologization is based. Clearly Levinas is prepared to radicalise the prohibition against murder×killing however, and he readily

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<sup>17</sup> As Derrida comments in ‘“Eating Well,” or the Calculation of the Subject,’ in a sentiment which echoes our own here, the “Thou shalt not kill” is addressed to the other and presupposes him. It is destined to the very thing it institutes, the other as man...The “Thou shalt not kill” – with all its consequences, which are limitless – has never been understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition, nor apparently by Levinas, as a “Thou shalt not put to death the living in general.” The other, such as this can be thought according to the imperative of ethical transcendence, is indeed the other man: man as other, the other as man’ (Derrida, 1991, 112-113).

cites the Hebrew tractate Baba Metsia (58b) in support of this initiative. Thus, 'whoever causes the face of his neighbor to go pale with shame in public is compared to an assassin,' he avers (*CTI* 63). If my 'assassination' of the Other can take the form of my embarrassing them, or forcing them to lose face (somewhat modest transgressions, one must agree), then why not also extend the outreach of the ethical to include the nonhuman creature? Why not indeed. Does Levinas' failure to do so not, therefore, expose his own pudency in the face of this restriction? After all, a face differs 'from an animal's head,' in its 'brutish dumbness,' Levinas implores, because it 'attends to its expression' (*PII* 55). 'Things give,' they do not 'offer a face,' for they are 'beings without a face' (*ES* 8).

Primarily, for a face to qualify as a face, the one who bears it (and who is borne by it) must speak. Only linguistic beings (i.e., human beings) are capable of *facing me*, therefore, because 'speaking' is a 'way of coming from behind one's appearance,' that is, from behind one's 'form' (*MS* 53). Speaking interrupts and de-formalizes form, one might say. However, given that Levinas operates, in later works, with a conception of language as 'saying,' or pre-diction (where 'saying' designates pre-verbal exposedness and vulnerability), his attempt to identify 'faciality,' that is, the capacity of the face to face one, with linguistic ability is problematic. Matters are complicated further by Levinas' admission, in an interview with Richard Kearney, that the human is characterized as human (and thus as face) not only because he or she 'is a being that can speak,' but also because he or she 'is a being who can lie,' one who can 'live in the dual possibility of exposure and deception' (Cohen, 1986, 29). Human beings are duplicitous. One is apt to be duped by the face (or at least by the physiognomy), as much as one is to be 'duped by morality,' it seems (*TI* 21). Indeed, many have been duped by Levinas' account of the face, one might argue, so willing are they to suspend critical judgment in the light of the analyses he protracts. The 'dual possibility,' Levinas outlines here, reflects the oscillation between creaturalty and conation that defines the amphibological subject. But, in order to bind the face (exclusively) to the human being, Levinas must concede that the face is itself capable of duplicity. Now, we have noted previously that a certain perfidiousness does in fact trouble the manifestation of the face. Yet, for the face to remain 'destitute' and 'homeless' it must present itself without guile; it is exposed and naked because it is refused the shelter (or concealment) duplicity would provide. Certainly, the putative withdrawal of the face from the horizons of



constitution, could be construed as a form of duplicity; the face is hidden from ‘view’ – it is invisible – and exceeds the limits of constation and discourse. But does such (im)modesty not also suggest that qua face, the face is precisely that which withdraws from the governance of the concept ‘man,’ and evades the τῶν ἁνθρώπων ‘homo sapiens’? Indeed, the face’s duplicity may reside in its very abnegation of form. One is deceived by the face into disassociating it from the material attachments to which it is undeniably bound. Levinas thus wishes to uphold the ‘nudity’ (*nudité*) of the face, with all that this entails, and maintain that the face-to-face (*face-à-face*) relation is exclusively human. Such requirements conflict, however, and, once again, one has cause to question the saliency of Levinas’ position here (and perhaps, to some extent, the legitimacy of his whole project (Derrida, 1978, 94)).

If the human introduces the ‘Good’ into being – the human is one who acts in spite of him or herself – and that which faces is human, then it follows that that which faces me, is that which is capable of both recognizing that the life of an other takes precedence over its own life, and acting in accordance with this recognition or law. A symmetry obtains, therefore, between the Other and myself to the extent that the one who faces me is, like me, a dedicant, that is, one who acknowledges (through word and deed) that their being is their being-for-others (that their time, like mine, begins with the Other), and where I, in fact, am one of those others toward whom they are obligated. At least two conclusions may be drawn from this logic of symmetry. Firstly, Levinas’ failure to include the nonhuman within the order of what signifies as a face, commits him to the economy of a transcendental symmetry (Derrida, 1978, 126), at odds with the structural asymmetry he believes to epitomize the face-to-face relation. For, if the Other’s facing me is predicated upon their being able to recognize an injunction in the face of their human counterparts, and act with suitable dis-interest, then the face is itself lodged within an economy of parity. That which faces is, that which, like me, is morally susceptible, such argumentation being ashamedly circular. Secondly, if my response to the summons of the face entails the ‘generosity of sacrifice *outside the known and the unknown*,’ such ‘sacrifice’ being ‘without calculation,’ as it were (*EP* 76; emphasis added), then one must either concede that anonymity is central to the encounter with the face (the face is henceforth extra-taxonomical), or, one must limit the scope of the sacrificial within ethics and delimit the extent of its dramatization more exactly, thereby introducing a certain ‘measure’ and metrologic into the field of proto-ethics. Jean-Luc Marion’s

comments are germane here. To 'find myself summoned,' he suggests, 'would lack all rigor if surprise did not deprive me, at least for a while and sometimes definitely, of knowing, in the instant of the summons, by what and by whom the call is exercised.' Anonymity, Marion asserts, 'therefore belongs strictly to the conditions for the possibility' of my being summoned, because it defines the 'unconditional poverty' of the face as such (Marion, 2002, 299). Now, anonymity may, as Marion indicates, characterize the immediacy of the encounter with the other qua face, initiating my response. However, ascertaining who or what the other is, is paramount if I am to act appropriately toward them (such propriety being less a question of etiquette than of respect for the concrete particularity of the one who faces me). Again, therefore, the alternance, or coruscation, of the face $\times$ countenance threatens to destabilize Levinas' project and indicates that moral life is marked by a basic tension between the demands of empirico-phenomenological concretion, and the injunctive force of an-archic responsibility. An overemphasis upon anonymity corrodes the difference that is fundamental to ethicality, while the elision of anonymity restricts the range of alterity unnecessarily.

Despite his admission that the 'ethical extends to all living beings' (*PM* 172), the compass of the proto-ethical most certainly does not. Any obligation one might have toward the nonhuman creature 'arises from the *transference* to animals of the idea of suffering,' Levinas maintains. It is because 'we, as human, know what suffering is,' he continues, that 'we can have this obligation' (*PM* 172; emphasis added). Levinas' use of the term 'transference' is significant on this occasion, I would argue. The concepts of 'mirroring' (*Spiegelung*) and 'pairing' (*Paarung*) form the centrepiece of the analysis of the 'alter-ego' Husserl sets forth in the fifth of his *Cartesian Meditations*. There, Husserl endeavours to present a phenomenological account of the constitution of the alter-ego, based upon the notion of what he calls an apperceptive transfer, or analogising apperception, in which the 'sense' I have of myself, qua ego, is transferred to another, qua alter-ego (*CM* §48-54 [136-149]). Levinas reproaches Husserl for what he deems, perhaps unfairly, to be the latter's 'gnoseology' (*CW* 165). The ego may grasp the other through an extension of its primordial sphere (*Eigensphäre*), however, the primacy and primordially of the ego's originary experience remains intact, Levinas argues. The 'transference' (ultimately a form of empathy (*Einfühlung*)) upon which Husserl's presentation of

the other is based, is decidedly egological, Levinas maintains, and thus cannot do justice to the deposition effectuated in the encounter with the face.

To suggest, therefore, that the nonhuman creature possesses the ethical status it does due to a similar act of analogization, is to locate the nonhuman outside the fellowship of the face. To be sure, phenomenologically there are numerous differences between 'human,' 'animal,' and 'plant' physiologies. It would be foolish to argue otherwise. However, when Levinas intimates that the 'human face is completely different' from that of the animal, and that 'only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal' (*PM* 172), does he not confound his own case for the authority of the face as an ethical signifier? *The face is not the countenance*, we recall. Moreover, the face is not a substance in which attributes or qualities inhere. As pure 'expression,' or 'gaze,' the face transcends the 'form' through which it signifies. Yet this very transcendence prevents one from identifying the face as either human, or nonhuman: the face is thus not susceptible to explication. For, according to the strictures of Levinas' own presentation of the face, the face can be neither human nor nonhuman as it 'involves a signifyingness of its own' entirely 'independent of the meaning received from the world' (*MS* 53). The face of the Other, qua *hapax*, is the face of the one who confronts me *hic et nunc*, but, qua face, this ethical cipher belongs to no one in particular because its 'manifestation,' καθ' αὐτό, is free from all *de facto* particularity.

The face, it seems, is 'nobody's' (like the 'nobody,' or 'they,' perhaps, to which Dasein surrenders itself in its 'Being-among-one-another [*Untereinandersein*]' (*BT* §27 [128])), set adrift, as it is, across the space of encounter between beings. Is it not this very lack of attachment, then, that renders the Other disconsolate and dejected? Furthermore, Levinas' exclusion of the nonhuman from the sodality of the face-to-face relation, undermines the cogency of his arguments for the supra-cultural status of the face. Levinas is, thereby, forced to grant either that his insistence upon the uniqueness of the human face is a product of his own historico-cultural legacy (hence cultures that acknowledge an ethical imperative toward the nonhuman and the elemental do so in consonance with axiological criteria that have come to regulate comportment within their respective home-worlds). Or, Levinas must permit greater phenomenological access to the face so as to enable analysis to clarify, more precisely, just how the face of the human differs from the face/physiognomy of the animal, plant or mineral. Of course, the face is no phenomenon (φαινόμενον).

Therefore, detailed phenomenological appraisal is ruled out. Likewise, the face does not admit of quiddity. Thus attempts to categorize its 'properties' are misguided. On both counts, one is forced to conclude, I believe, that the 'absolutism,' with which Levinas credits the face, is always already contextually absolute, that is, it is absolute, or binding, within limits. Even Levinas recognizes this, albeit indirectly, when he confers that the third party 'is of itself the limit of responsibility' (*OBBE* 157). Otherwise, the whole account of the face risks degenerating into what Heidegger would call, a 'fanciful idealization [*ein phantastisch idealisiertes*]' (*BT* §44 [229]), which is, even according to the motif of 'risk' deployed in *Otherwise than Being*, certainly a fine risk to be run.

Ultimately, then, Levinas ought to resign himself to taking up residence *at the limit* of his own home-world, where 'values' indigenous to one home-world (*Heimwelt*) come into contact, or proximity, with those local to another and mutually fecundate one another. For it is here, in the interspace between home-worlds, as it were, that the peculiar exchange between 'signification,' its 'constitution,' and subsequent and ongoing 'exegesis,' takes place. (Indeed, does philosophy not consist, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us, 'in installing itself on the edge of being,' at 'the joints where the multiple *entries* of the world cross' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 260)?) This event may not give rise to the stability or 'foundation of a site,' as such (*TI* 77). Yet emplacement (being emplaced or 'dwelling' at the inter-face of home-worlds) is integral to its heuristic character. And while Levinas certainly acknowledges the conflux of 'Jewish' and 'Greek' culture within his thought, he remains committed to the belief that the face 'jostles' and 'disturbs' all 'mundane meaning' (*MS* 53). Quite how it achieves this feat concurrently with the fact that its 'transcendence' is 'not enacted outside the world,' is unclear (*TI* 172). Although, Levinas will submit to the notion that the 'Other is present in a cultural whole' and is 'illuminated by this whole' (*MS* 52), the 'face' of the Other, is, he crows, that 'which escapes comprehension' (*OF* 9). Yet, surely one cannot be expected to concur with the suggestion that the face is, as Husserl would say, 'simply there.' For 'this "simply being there"' always consists of certain mental and kinaesthetic 'processes of specific and changing structure' (*IP* 9). What is more, these processes are themselves constituted 'generatively,' such that it is not possible to specify 'where' or 'when' the constitution of particular 'objects' (or, in this instance, ethical injunctions)

'begins' or 'ends.' As Husserl surmises, 'are there any actual limits' to constitutive activity (*IP* 57)?

If the constitution of the face passes me by and interrupts the governance of my primordial sphere, it does so because it passes into the recesses of tradition and not because it breaches the limits of constitutional structure. Perhaps Levinas comes close to acknowledging this situation when he considers the possibility that a face might 'abide both in representation and in proximity,' that is in 'community and difference' (*OBBE* 154). Ultimately, however, Levinas fails to develop this insight beyond the rather recondite suggestion mooted above.

Crucially, I believe that the intra-textual 'spacing' (*espacement*) of Levinas' work conceals 'enclaves' or 'ghettos' in which certain identities are cast, and certain alliances forged. Nonhuman creatures are ultimately consigned to one of these enclaves, destined to remain 'forever faceless' (*TI* 160) within the confines of their gaol, akin to those outcasts (*zarim*) driven from the Temple precincts throughout the history of Judaism. Among other such identities cast by Levinas, one may number: the 'pagan,' the 'mystic,' the 'primitive,' the 'artist,' the 'psychoanalyst,' and, most notable of all, 'woman.' A coterie of improper names, one might say, amidst the 'names of persons whose saying signifies a face' (*PN* 4), an onomasticon of dubious standing, quite out of place (*ἄτοπος*) in a work otherwise so sensitive to treating alterity in its various forms.

### § 11. *A genealogy of things*

In Levinas' thought, nonhuman beings (including that most nebulous of concepts, 'nature') possess what meaning they do as adjuncts to human interaction. Things 'have a price,' their 'rootedness in the elemental' confirms their status as possessions (*TI* 140). One thus approaches the Other across the 'world of possessed things,' rearranging one's homestead (*demeure*) appropriately, so as to cordially 'welcome' them (*TI* 76). Qua furnishings (*muebles*), things occupy no place of their own, but are rather movable goods, merchandise to be exchanged with others. Were it not for the fact that Levinas' phenomenological descriptions of domiciliary life are at once prescriptive, his disquisition of 'things' would reflect, quite accurately, the dominant attitude in and from which one is oriented toward 'things,' and in which one seizes, appropriates and expropriates them correspondingly. However, Levinas espouses this



policy toward the nonhuman (and ultimately remains loyal to Heidegger's conceptions of *Zuhandenheit* and *Zeughaftigkeit*, despite altering their nuances slightly), a stance perhaps explained by his concession that 'Nature,' when 'it does not attest to the glory of God,' is 'only understandable as such on the plane of the human world of property' (ET 28). And when do elemental nature and nonhuman creatures 'attest' to the 'glory' (*Kabod*) of 'God,' one may ask? They do so, Levinas affirms, when they are raised to the level of 'consecrated Goods' (NPI 108), that is, when they are freely circulated and gifted to others; when that which is possessed becomes, through a process of ethical exchange, that which is given. It may be that such reasoning is justified within the theological framework of Mitnagdic Judaism. However, as a 'phenomenological' account of the presentation of nonhuman nature to 'sense' (*sens*), Levinas' descriptions are inadequate and saturated with positings that require further explication.

To many of Levinas' readers, the invocation of 'God' at critical junctures during the course of Levinas' explication of phenomena, will, no doubt, prove irksome (particularly if 'God' is invoked to legitimate what would otherwise be shortcomings in phenomenological description). If ethics is first philosophy (πρώτη φιλοσοφία), and it appears that ethics is always crossed with theology (θεολογική) in Levinas' thought, then things, by proxy, are to be treated as donanda. Donanda, qua 'consecrated goods,' occupy the highest echelon in Levinas' genealogy of things. They occupy this stratum because Levinas recognizes the centrality of material provision in ethical life. One does not approach the Other empty handed: things are thus not simply ready-to-hand, or handy, but in demand and demanded by others. Things compose an integral part of the liturgy, or 'work,' of substitution. Sensible things are incised in the 'living flesh of my own substance,' that is, my 'home' (TI 76), and are consequently offered up to the Other as part of my very corporeal being. Arguably, things are prostheses that extend the range of the ethical body (*corps éthique*), permitting me to give of myself more abundantly and meet others needs more directly.

Levinas' genealogy of things is stratified in concert with the general scheme, and developmental progression, of his thought. Hitherto, in our analysis of Levinas' work, we have encountered variously: 'objects' (*objets*), 'tools' (*outils*), 'toys' (*jouets*), and 'furnishings' (*muebles*), each depicting, as it were, a 'stage' en route toward the accomplishment of ethical life. 'Things,' as such, are

polymorphous, they are what one might term, polymorphs, endlessly malleable in accordance with the desiderations of their possessors, manipulanda to satisfy human need. The constitution of the thing admits of genealogical layers, therefore. The consecrated 'good,' given to the Other, reveals layers of constitution (despite Levinas' pronouncement that the 'revelation of matter is essentially superficial' (*TI* 192)), each disclosing some particular sedimentation of meaning, and reflecting a specific genealogico-generative stratum, in the ethical seriation Levinas enunciates.<sup>18</sup>

In the essay 'Language and Proximity' (1967), things are presented, first and foremost, as contactual. Perceptual experience is itself a certain relation of proximity to things. Thus, a thing's being 'present' is not characterized by its 'manifestation,' but by its 'proximity' (*LP* 118). Things brush against one, stimulating and motivating conduct by invading one's perceptual field and commanding one's senses in their orchestration of the given. Indeed, the 'visible caresses the eye,' Levinas confesses (*LP* 118), in a manner unaccounted for by (thetic) intentional analysis, and lending an erotic quality to our relationship with things. To be sure, Husserl is well aware of the *lure* of the sensible. In a somewhat comical passage from his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Husserl describes the pull exerted upon a subject by the thing. In 'every moment of perceiving,' Husserl suggests, the 'perceived,' as it were, 'calls out to us':

"There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to see all sides. You will get to know me like this, all that I am, all my surface qualities, all my inner sensible qualities" (Husserl, 2001, 41).

A phenomenology of the voluptuous, such as that broached in *Totality and Infinity* (*TI* 265-266), would need to consider the implications of Husserl's proposal in detail, and augment its findings to accommodate the insights gleaned by him. (Contra Husserl, one would need to question the viability of attaining intimate and exhaustive 'knowledge' of things, for this would appear to suppress the 'wonder' occasioned by their quoddity, beneath the drive to master their quiddity.) Levinas, of course, does not provide his reader with such an addendum. The erotic orientation, whether this obtains between human subjects, or between human and nonhuman beings (and let us be clear, we are not treating of bestiality here, although, with Merleau-Ponty, one

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<sup>18</sup> One might append the fetish to this genealogy of things since 'to a certain extent things exist as fetishes,' Levinas confirms (*LB* 46).

might speak of ‘a coition of our body with things’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 320)) is sublimated, and intentionality held back, or so Levinas will maintain, in the ethical encounter.

Things may administer sensory delight, beckoning and luring their suitors to participate in the folly of their manifestive-cum-proximal being. However, the ‘thing’ is awarded its ‘final reality’ (TI 178) – it achieves its τέλειον – as that which is given, and not as that which incites conative or libidinal interest. Yes, the thing caresses. But it does so, Levinas urges, because it bears the trace(s) of human others across its surfaces. Hence, things ‘caress,’ or ‘obsess’ one, because they attest to the other person to whom they belong. Or, alternatively, they excite a dual movement of appropriation/expropriation by reminding one of the indigence of others. In neither case, therefore, does the ‘thing’ bear witness to its own requirements (for example, to be safeguarded, left alone, respected, or appreciated). Thus, the thing does not face me, rather the Other faces me through the thing; *the face takes a detour through the things*, one might say. The thing is a vehicle or conduit for the face, a means through which it may signify. As Levinas explains, in a telling footnote from *Otherwise than Being*:

It is as possessed by a neighbor, as relics, and not as clothed with cultural attributes, that things first obsess. Beyond the “mineral” surface of things, contact is an obsession by the trace of a skin, the trace of an invisible face, which things bear and which only reproduction fixes as an idol. The purely mineral contact is privative. Obsession breaks with the rectitude of consumption and cognition. But caresses are dormant in all contact, and contact in all sensible experience: the thematized disappears in the caress, in which the thematization becomes a proximity. There is indeed a part of metaphor in that, and the things are taken to be true and illusory before being near. But is not the poetry of the world prior to the truth of things, and inseparable from what is proximity par excellence, that of the neighbor, or of the proximity of the neighbor par excellence (OBBE 191n.10).

Tenderness extends to things because they are tendered, that is, because they are part of an economy of donation and provision. Arguably, therefore, the thing, in Levinas’ thinking, never quite exceeds its status as ‘stock,’ or ‘merchandise,’ and remains enmeshed within an economic system largely inimical to the suggestion that the thing might signify in any other way than as that which is given. Levinas simply shifts this economy from the market place (ἀγορά) to the precincts of the temple (τέμενος), an act of relocation he sanctions to justify the genealogic to which he submits himself throughout his work.

As Heidegger indicates, however, there are various ways in which phenomena (φαινόμενα) can be ‘covered up’ (*verdeckt*) and ‘buried over’ (*verschüttet*) during the course of an analysis, thereby losing their ‘indigenous character’ (*Bodenständigkeit*) (*BT* §7 [36]). Levinas, is, I believe, guilty of such covering up (*Verdeckung*) in relation to things, despite his notable insights (albeit elaborations of Husserl) into the contactual nature of perceptual acts, a subject to which we will attend, in more detail, in part two of the present study. Does the face of the nonhuman not get ‘buried over’ in the ethical enthusiasm (ένθουσιασμος), and donative fervour, to which Levinas succumbs? Despite his insistence that such ‘enthusiasm’ (*enthousiasme*) – the same inspired by the other – ‘is not intoxication [*n’est pas ivresse*],’ but rather a ‘sobering’ (*dégrissement*), does Levinas’ thought not itself require, as he would put it, ‘ever still to be sobered [*toujours encore à dégriser*],’ (*CW* 166; *CV* 57)? Mere objects, after all, ‘knock’ at the ‘door of consciousness,’ Husserl informs us, summoning us to them ‘until finally the object is noticed.’ If an object can ‘intrude upon’ a subject, and ‘exercise stimulation’ over it (*Id II* §55), might an animal, bird, fish, or plant, not similarly summon one to responsibility, or even regard one (*on regardent*), in a proto-ethical sense? Might the thing not give me to myself in various ways; do I not become manifest to myself through the things? What then regulates the distribution of sense (*sens*) in Levinas’ work, if not the apparent conservatism of dicta ill suited to addressing the destitution of the things themselves (*Sachen Selbst*) in their concretion. Indeed do the needs of the nonhuman not become ‘veiled’ through their being taken as manipulanda, much in the way that what is ready-to-hand is, apropos of Heidegger, ‘veiled’ by being made the object of an assertion (*BT* §33 [158])?

There are inconsistencies and notable lacunae in Levinas’ account of things. Plainly, Levinas breaks with his restrictive policy toward things in the privileged treatment he accords to ‘Scripture.’ Scripture, he beseeches, must be saved from ‘being turned into a mere book,’ that is to say, ‘just a thing,’ by ‘allowing it to resonate with the great and living voice of teaching’ (*SIRI* 220). (We notice here that ‘Scripture’ is to be let be, where the thing is to be appropriated and given). Likewise, scriptural verses, he notes, ‘cry out spontaneously’ to be ‘interpreted’ (*TS* 51). Somehow, within the genealogic to which Levinas subscribes, ‘Scripture’ has managed to accede the station of ‘thing’ and overcome the impediments of its bookish form. ‘Scripture,’ like the ‘face,’ breaks through its form (μορφή). The

*sacra pagina* is no thing, it seems. How fortuitous! The 'Holy Scriptures' (*Saintes Ecritures*), Levinas argues, differ from 'purely literary texts' because they disclose 'another secret [*autre secret*]' such works of 'literature' have lost (SB 171; PS 204). While both textual genres are characterized by 'polysemy' and promote a certain hermeneutic 'pluralism' (SB 171), the scriptures purportedly set in motion an exegetical programme that allows the 'meaning' of the 'texts' to 'mean fully,' and to 'be renewed' generatively. This 'continuous Revelation [*Révélation continue*],' or hermeneutic event, takes place in the 'distance that separates the text from the reader,' and is the 'space' in which the 'evolution of the spirit [*devenir même de l'esprit*]' is 'lodged' (SB 170; PS 203), an epochal space that supports the edification of the textual community.

The difference between literary and scriptural texts appears to be found, according to Levinas, in the kind of space they engender and make available to those who consult them, therefore. The scriptural economy is a more commodious setting within which to stage and sustain the human adventure, Levinas will aver. It is capacious enough to accommodate diverse interpretation – indeed this very diversity is instrumental in establishing its spatial dimensions – yet sufficiently delimited to organize such polyvalence around a common source (*Quelle*), or core. Accordingly, 'Scripture' is both origin and production, less a site than the dramatization of space itself. As Levinas notes, 'the volume of the book' is 'a form of living space,' and 'reading' is a 'way of inhabiting' (RIJT 130), a mode of occupancy somehow more dignified, Levinas will maintain, than the attachment to 'place' found among 'pagan' peoples. Moreover, 'Scripture' evinces a 'mode of being' distinct from that of the 'pure matter available to the grammarian's analysis,' for it is the 'place' where 'all the harmonics of the said resonate' and 'an entire life is breathed into the letters of the text, inspiring it' (SAW 127).

One cannot help but note the rapturous tone of Levinas' remarks concerning scripture, and while each reader must assess the merits of such remarks for him or herself (for clearly it is not a matter of judging the probity of one man's enthusiasm for the scriptural tradition of his faith), one can question the saliency of the basic opposition, or polarization, that underpins Levinas' comments. Despite the pertinence of Levinas' observations, he overlooks, I believe, an issue central to the decipherability of what one might call, textual difference. For, by differentiating between scriptural and literary economies on the basis of the kind of space they



produce, whether, that is, they are suitably fecund and maintain a clear separation between 'letter' and 'spirit,' and whether the distantiation they support is pure or not (this requirement for separation (*séparation*) is, as we have seen, reiterated endlessly throughout the Levinasian corpus), Levinas fails to consider the role of attention in the classification of textual type. Surely, as Colin Davis affirms, the 'real' difference between so called 'sacred' and 'secular' texts 'lies in the kind of attention they receive rather than any inherent quality' that may or may not be attributed to them (Davis, 1996, 118).

One is disposed toward a text, or, as Levinas would say, one is *zum-Buchsein*, in myriad ways (all susceptible to phenomenological explication), and these routings, or points of orientation, determine the status of the text toward which one comports oneself. One's orientation, qua exegete, is a product of the home-world (*Heimwelt*) from whence one originates (and to which one is attached) and the embodied disciplines that one has learnt there, and to which one is committed. What prevents scripture from becoming a mere artefact (ποιούμενα), or from being encountered as a kind of cultural 'heirloom' (i.e., as belonging to a world, or an equipmental context, that 'is no longer' (*BT* §73 [380])), is to be largely accounted for in terms of the attentional regard such texts elicit. Thus, among a people, *Volk*, or *peuple*, a tree, an animal, or a natural landmark, such as a hillock or boulder (as is well attested to, for example, by scholars such as Mircea Eliade<sup>19</sup>), may function, qua symbol (σύμβολον), as a focal point for the repetition and renewal of meaning within a given community, in a manner not entirely dissimilar (although clear differences are to be noted) to that of the 'Scriptures' whose 'uniqueness' Levinas defends. The thing assumes its status through the attentional regard it receives and provokes and not because it is intrinsically 'holy' in a supra-attentional sense. Is not to argue thus to court idiocy, such non-sense deserving no place in phenomenology nor, one might add, in a religion of adults (*religion d'adultes*), such as that commended by Levinas?

An obvious objection to the line of reasoning ventured here must, I believe, be entertained at this juncture, for no doubt our argument risks unfair dismissal if it can not be shown why objects and things ought to be included within the fold of proto-ethical consideration. Can one seriously be expected to accept the proposition

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Mircea Eliade's, *The Sacred and the profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1987, 116-159).

that all manner of animate, as well as inanimate, things face one and summon one to act responsibly toward them? Surely the *mise-en-scène* of ethics is no Disney like 'Fantasia'? Scullery objects and the furnishings of one's home, do not, under normal circumstances 'persecute' one, do they? The obsessive compulsive may find, of course, that she is assailed by the sight of dirt, or the thought that appliances might not be switched off (and arguably responsibility, as Levinas describes it, is a compulsion of sorts, I believe), but that can be put down to an 'aberrance' of comportment, can it not? If only matters were that simple.

Do the conventionally inanimate 'animate' one ethically? Can one, as it were, be be-souled (*Beseelt*) by the nonhuman other?<sup>20</sup> I am not claiming that ethical consideration ought to extend to kitchen appliances, nor that the toys in the child's bedroom demand justice (while those who made them, sudating in the heat of third world 'sweat shops,' clearly do). As Derrida reminds us, Levinas does not 'seek to propose laws,' or specific 'moral rules' – he does not 'seek to determine a morality' – but rather an 'Ethics of Ethics' (Derrida, 1978, 111). It seems to this reader, that resistance to the suggestion that things might face one issues, once again, from an inability to distinguish between the 'ethical' and the 'proto-ethical' orders of description. Such equivocation is pardonable, however. For, as we have seen, Levinas himself taunts his readers repeatedly by failing to demark these respective regions precisely. While the 'ethical' and the 'proto-ethical' invariably dovetail into one another (the latter accomplishes the former), proto-ethical responsibility expresses an orientation rather than a determinate programme of ethical precepts. (The fact that Levinasian proto-ethics gives rise to neither a 'determined ethics' nor 'determined laws' without 'negating or forgetting itself' is, as Derrida confers, a serious cause for concern, however (Derrida, 1978, 111).) Thus, one can argue with Husserl, that our being directed toward a thing, our bearing toward it as such, is itself a 'heeding' of that 'thing.' Valuation is implicated in directedness. Therefore, in 'any act' some 'mode of heedfulness dominates,' Husserl adverts (*Id* §37). If one were to take the further (Levinasian) step of reducing, or tracing, this heedfulness back to the 'susceptibility' (*susceptibilité*) of the subject, a move in which the 'passivity' inherent in all directedness would be underscored, then the 'evidence' for the

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<sup>20</sup> In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty will state that 'the significance of a thing inhabits that thing as the soul inhabits the body' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 319-320). Might one not argue, then, that one is also animated by the thing and inspired to act by its appeal?

inclusion of things within the fold of the proto-ethical, begins to appear incontrovertible. But, heedfulness need not entail ethical obligation, nor does it sanction the application of rights to things, nor foster the idea that one has a duty toward them in a Kantian sense. Such notions are the products of second order categorial acts, which proceed the encounter with the face, and testify to the involvement, and mediation, of the third party (*le tiers*) in deliberations of ethical conduct. (Although, as we have argued, the very 'faciality' of the face arises against a socio-cultural horizon.) But does Levinas not contend both that I am susceptible before the face of the other person, and that susceptibility is accomplished as my bearing of them? Susceptibility is thus not simply the event of corporeity (qua exposedness), but the conversion of my vulnerability into my being vulnerable for-the-other, and, moreover, the sufferance of my flesh for them. Has Levinas not allowed the proto-ethical to slide back into the ethical?

Now, one can argue, quite convincingly, that 'encounter' is, in the language of *Totality and Infinity*, deposition and displacement, and, indeed, that I am susceptible to the incursions of others into the domiciliary space of my *Kernwelt*. Yet, the claim that my being susceptible (which can be substantiated phenomenologically) demands that I am obligated to give of myself to-the-point-of-expiration (*OBBE* 182), cannot be evidenced phenomenologically; unless, that is, one bestows a generative sense upon the *Sinngebung* accomplished in the face-to-face relation; unless, that is, one concedes that the face-to-face is always already intersected by the third party, and hence that socially generated values and practices substruct the authority of the face, and are its aetiological condition. The immediacy of the encounter with the face, and the interruption of this encounter by the third party, are, it seems, coetaneous, therefore. Thus, when Levinas claims that the 'for' of my being-for-the-other (*être-pour-l'autre*), culminates in the act of ethical portage, and hence in my being *deiparous*, a bearer of 'God,' as it were (portage remains an 'act,' despite breaking with the logical opposition between activity and passivity, although my will is now thine), does he not already defer to the mandates of his Jewish heritage, mandates which exceed the 'space' of proto-ethical proximity as he outlines it?

In effect, what this means, I think, is as follows. One is susceptible, and one's being susceptible is one's being here, exposed to others. Susceptibility is not however, at least initially, a stance one takes in the face of the Other (one is proto-

active, rather than pro-active, in this regard), but rather the *conditio sine qua non* of the flesh. Ethical ordinances proceed susceptibility, unless, that is, one maintains that the schema of the body is immediately ethical, immediately attuned to the face of the ‘human’ other, *ab initio*. Such ordinances are instituted culturally – they attest to one’s submission to a world – and are the products of acts of co-constitution and co-historization. How I respond to who, or what, faces me, is the result of a complex and ongoing process of instruction, habituation, intuition, and instinct. The ethical body (σώμα) bears the inscriptions of countless teachers, one might say, as the corpus of Levinas’ work bears the (d)rash of his teacher Chouchani, the ‘prestigious master’ (*maître prestigieux*) under whose ‘firm rule’ (*ferule*) Levinas was tutored in the subtle art of Talmudic study and exegesis, an art he subsequently applied to ‘philosophical’ as well as ‘Talmudic’ texts (*NGTT* 117; *AQTT* 144). The body is the first text, the first place where injunctions are inscribed and edicts installed, and the human other is not the only scribe – there are others, one might contend.

But wait. To argue thus is to argue with Levinas, is it not? The ethical body (*corps éthique*) is radically passive, he will maintain, formed through innumerable encounters, more an archive, or record of susceptibility, than an origin or ἀρχή. The ethical body subtends the *corps propre* and thus undercuts the volitional activity upon which its exercise is based. *Me voici* is animated by the Other (the ‘psyche’ in the same) – susceptibility is motivated by the other person. With all this one may concur heartily. Yet, this reader is troubled by the procedure such susceptibility undergoes, and the form into which the *golem* of the body is moulded. The body begins to assume the prospect of something occult, of something ‘created’ as if by sorcery, rather than that which is recovered (*après coup*) through sober phenomenological reflection. It is one thing to describe the subject as a ‘hostage’ (*otage*), yet quite another to pronounce the subject ‘responsible for the universe’ (*AGCW* 170), as if this responsibility (*responsabilité*) were the ‘teaching,’ or primal datum, of the face. In order to retain something of the ethical sense (*sens éthique*) for which Levinas argues, I believe one is compelled to defend the proposition that tertiality is the horizon (ὀριζμός), or should one say, the proto-horizon, of the face qua ethical signifier (much in the way, perhaps, that the ‘call of conscience,’ in *Being and Time*, ultimately depends for its ‘sense’ upon the account of ‘historicality’ (*Geschichtlichkeit*) Heidegger presents toward the close of that work (*BT* §§72-77)).

Thus, while the face may be, according to Levinas, the veritable *lux mundi*, it arises against a social horizon vulnerable to the librations of co-constitutional activity. Levinas does not analyse this collaborative endeavour in sufficient depth, despite conceding that it is ‘because my position as an I is effectuated already in fraternity’ that ‘the face can present itself to me as a face’ (TI 280). Furthermore, I would aver, the ‘manifestation’ of the face presents itself against the obscurity of the earth ‘Ark’ that patiently bears it, together with the subject, to whom the face reveals itself. What shows itself from itself as a face (within a particular era or epoch), does so against a trans-historical geo-logical horizon. Needless to say, when Levinas endorses, as he does above, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin’s (Lurianic) Kabbalism, to claim that one’s responsibility is universal in extent, the *universum* both he and Hayyim Volozhiner have in mind, is one circumscribed by the teachings of the Torah (and not that composite of dimensions appraised by the science of ‘Physics’). The topography of ethical obligation does not extend, for Levinas and Hayyim of Volozhin, beyond the limes of human economic life, even if more detailed phenomenological analysis reveals the ‘world,’ qua earth-Ark, to be the bearer of untold micro-ecologies and mini-mundi neglected by the accounts of ethical life these thinkers present.

It may be that the one who encounters me is *un peu chameau*, a bit of a rascal, or a touch churlish. However, their being camelish presents no obstacle to their being considered proto-ethically by me. A beastly mien is no excuse for proto-ethical indolence, Levinas assures us. If the one who confronts me is quite literally cameloid, however, as is the case in Genesis 24, where, as Levinas reminds us, Rebekah ‘waters the camels’ of Abraham’s servant who could not themselves ‘ask to drink’ (BG 134), then such figurative play cedes to allegorization (in the best tradition of the medieval bestiary), whereby Rebekah’s service toward the nonhuman simply ‘prefigures’ the responsibility enacted in the face-to-face relation. Thus, as Levinas argues, the camel is merely a ‘prefiguration’ of the ‘first person to come my way’ (BG 134). Nonhuman nature ‘takes on meaning,’ by deferral, in the service of the ‘mercy’ (*rachamim*) accorded to one human being by another (BG 134). The nonhuman, therefore, reminds us of the debt we owe to other humans (NDNR 152). But why is personhood (incidentally, never defined by Levinas) the criterion of responsibility? Might one not, in the spirit of Derrida’s essay ‘At this very moment in this work here I am’ (1980), and in the spirit of Rebekah’s charitable gesture to her



parched guests, not utter the word 'Bois' in the face of the nonhuman, and invite the nonhuman creature to slake its thirst at one's expense, and at the expense of principia (ἀρχαί) that restrict the face to the human being? Might the speciesism inherent in ethical metaphysics not need to be reviewed, and the criterion of 'personhood,' be either adapted or abandoned,<sup>21</sup> in order to respond to the summons of 'who,' or 'whatever,' may come our way? The boundaries of ethical space ought to be flexible if the space into which the Other is welcomed (and within which their alterity is honoured and upheld) is to be truly peaceable, a space opened under the *mezuzah*, or sign, of welcome.

For the 'wild barbarian character of alterity' (TRA 347) to be truly respected, I believe Levinas' thought must subject itself to the barbarity of revision. If the first word one utters upon meeting an other is 'peace' (VO 113), then one must be prepared to say '*shalom*' in the face of the nonhuman creature, and offer them a place of accommodation (*akhsaniah*) in which to breathe and live (and, after all, proto-ethics largely concerns the breathe and breathing (OBBE 181)). Here, the offertory of lodging might simply entail letting the Other be in their natural habitat, and letting that habitat itself be, and be itself, so as to be free of the unnecessary hindrances of imposed suffering and exploitation.

To be sure, we will be reproached for continuing to conflate the orders of animate and inanimate being, the artefactual and the natural. Levinas is himself no less precise in this regard, one must note. The concept of the thing employed by Levinas is perilously vague, and appears indiscriminate in its consignment of the nonhuman to the plight of an exilic fate in a 'forth world [*quart monde*]' (DR 169) quite beyond the order of proto-ethical concern. But if things are to face one, and if their (initial) 'landing' is, as Marion confirms, 'unpredictable,' and defined by 'anonymity' (Marion, 2002, 132), then, at the level, or stratum, of proto-ethics, such distinctions are altogether less binding, if not otiose. Husserl, who concedes that 'the problem of non-human animality' requires 'thorough phenomenological explication,' notes that animals, or 'Brutes,' are 'essentially constituted for me as *abnormal* "variants" of my humanness,' despite the fact that among them 'normality and abnormality' may in turn be differentiated (CM §55 [154]). For Levinas, the variance

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<sup>21</sup> In the essay 'Nom d'un chien ou le droit naturel' (1975), Levinas will employ the term 'person' to describe the character of the dog, 'Bobby,' who befriended him, and those interned with him, during the War. Bobby is a 'person' because he is a 'friend of man.' His 'dignity' (*dignité*), for Levinas, remains defined wholly in terms of his relation to human beings, therefore (NDNR 152).

adumbrated here is subordinate to the more primordial separation that disparts one existent from the other (and let us be clear, the nonhuman does not 'ek-sist' for either Levinas or Heidegger). Variation is thus construed principally in terms of 'strangeness.' One might assume, therefore, that the differentiation Husserl adduces between 'species,' would only hold for Levinas *a posteriori*, that is to say, post susception. This is resolutely not the case, however. Indeed, one is once again left wondering what the exact nature of the relationship between susception and reflection is. At what point (or stage) do second order evaluative judgments disrupt the proximity of contact and transform its immediacy into the calculations of ethical science? As Husserl observes, 'in infancy we had to learn to see physical things,' such 'modes of consciousness of them' preceding all others 'genetically,' he proffers (*CM* §38 [112]). Similarly, one might hasten to add, the ethical subject must be instructed to recognize the face, and to differentiate between who, or what, does, and does not, traumatize it. To 'receive the given,' is, after all, already to 'receive it as taught' (*TI* 92)? It may be, as Levinas avers, that 'Husserl does not raise the *metaphysical problem*' of the 'situation' of '*Homo philosophus*' (*TIHP* 142). However, Levinas himself arguably provides no account of what we might call the *pedagogical predicament* of his own *homo expositus*, a severe oversight for a phenomenology otherwise so attentive to locating phenomena (φαινόμενα) against the horizons of their constitution.

To be sure, the second order activity of describing who, or what, an existent is, is, as Llewelyn indicates, 'part of what it is to behave responsibly to it qua existent,' for it is 'part of what is called for if the existent is to be respected for its own sake.' Such a response, Llewelyn argues, may only be solicited if 'acknowledgement' is first made of the 'prima-facie responsibility to support an existent because it is, in abstraction from what it is' (Llewelyn, 2000, 225-226). I believe Llewelyn to be shrewd in his assessment here. Moreover, the logic of Levinas' own presentation of the face ultimately commits one to reasoning along such lines, especially if one wishes to preserve the sense of the face as that which signifies in spite of the form through which it reveals itself. Levinas deviates from the letter of his own 'testimony' (he shuns the tutelage of the face) because he awards the ethical teachings of his own generative tradition a normative function within the domain of the proto-ethical. The third party does, of course, intersect the axis of the face-to-face relation. However, the third party need not be a Mitnagdic

Jew, nor the social horizon of its intervention, that of Mitnagdic Judaism. These are important provisos upon which one must, I fear, insist, if one is to continue to read Levinas responsibly today.

Despite Levinas' own admission that a 'prophetism,' and a 'Talmudism,' preceding 'theological considerations,' are revealed in the 'face of the other man' (ETE 112), he does not, I believe, recognize the full extent to which the theological 'considerations' to which he refers here – the theological montage supposedly deconstructed by the summons of the face – set the stage within which the drama he describes takes place. Expressed phenomenologically, one might contend, then, that the face is an interface between the susceptibility of the flesh and the instruction of the third party, the 'place' where these two vectors coincide as portage. Certainly, Levinas' claim that the face is a-historical (the one-for-the-other cannot be 'collected into a history,' he states (OBBE 70)), and his insistence that 'ethics' is 'independent' in relation to 'history' (S 295), cannot, I would argue, be sustained unless one interpret what Levinas means by the 'face' in this way. The structure outlined here is trans-historical, therefore (it is not relative to one historical period or epoch) and heritable in nature. The face thus transcends history by virtue of being a trans-historical, heritable phenomenon. For as long as *Dasein* *me voici* has been, for as long, therefore, as the human existent has ek-sisted, and occupied the (pre)originary topos of its there (Da), a structural alliance has held between what I am calling here, the susceptibility of the body, the instruction of the third party, and the signifier (or dare one say, the symbol (σύμβολον)) through which the former are brought into alignment. Providing we do not delimit the sense of susception, instruction and interdiction too strictly, we may accede to their being trans-historical phenomena. The proto-ethical structuration of sense is, likewise, trans-historical within the limits circumscribed by its heritable production. The face is a 'noumenon' (FC 21), therefore, only to the extent that it exceeds the bounds of epochal constitution, and not because it transcends epochality as such. In point of fact, does Levinas not define 'liturgy' (*liturgie*) precisely as a 'going beyond one's epoch [*dépassement de son époque*],' thus lending direct support to such an interpretation of his work (MS 50; SeS 46)?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Let us not also forget Levinas' statement from *Otherwise than Being*, that responsibility 'comes from before and goes beyond what abides in the suspense of an époque' (OBBE 97).

## § 12. *The interruption of the face-to-face*

The status of the 'third party' (*le tiers*) in Levinas' work is ambiguous. Despite Levinas' often rather gnostic statements concerning the role of the third party, the tertial dimension of first philosophy (*philosophie première*) remains poorly explicated. Although one might argue that Levinas' principal foci are the face-to-face relation and the de-situation of the 'ego,' the third party arguably returns proto-ethics to the jurisdiction of phenomenological accountability, reigning in on the excesses of the face-to-face and restoring equity to an otherwise one-way, unilateral, movement of sense constitution (*MS* 49). But how does the third party reorient and recalibrate the work of proto-ethics? How is this reversion of contact into consciousness accomplished positively by the third party; and at what juncture does the third party intervene, on my behalf, to mitigate against the demands of ethical diacony? Clearly, these are questions of some import. Levinas' response is, as one might expect, cryptic. It is debatable whether the ballast of tertiality is sufficiently weighted to ground the hyperbolism of wave after wave of Levinas' daunting, if not somewhat fustian, pronouncements. Moral life is, it appears, uncompromising in its inordinacy. However, by way of concretion, Levinas does affirm the relationship with the third party to be an 'incessant correction' of the 'asymmetry of proximity in which a face is looked at' (*OBBE* 158). The spiritual 'optics' of the face-to-face are amplified, and their focus enlarged, to embrace not only 'others' (my neighbour's contemporaries) but me, myself, because, Levinas opines, 'my lot is important [*mon sort importe*]' (*OBBE* 161; *AE* 250). The third party gives me back to myself as a member of society. The 'incessancy' of this procedure indicates that what we might refer to as the *facies interrupta* effectuated by the third party, eventuates 'in the midst of proximity' itself, and not outside it (*OBBE* 159).

The limits of responsibility – the limits of substitution as such – are therefore demarcated in the midst of (*au sein de*) the encounter with the face. As Derrida notes, it is as if the 'unicity of the face,' the irreducible singularity upon which Levinas repeatedly insists, were 'plural a priori' (Derrida, 1999, 110). The face-to-face relation is thus itself the situation of a birth, the birth of 'justice' (*justice*) that is 'nascent' in the very 'abnegation' before the face of the neighbour (*OBBE* 193n.29). A certain synchrony, it seems, perturbs the diachrony of two at the moment of their contact, one might argue. The very moment of diachronic deferral and suspension is riven, in the instant of its an-archy, by the intervention of the third

party. The alternation, determinative of diachrony, is complicated further by being disrupted, *in media res*, by the third party and the demand for ‘justice among incomparable ones’ they institute (*OBBE* 16). I am obsessed by the third party, who, Levinas confides, ‘looks at me in the eyes of the other’ (*TI* 213). With the arrival of the third (an arrival marking at once a ‘permanent entry [*entrée permanente*]’ into the space of the *face-à-face* (*OBBE* 160; *AE* 249)), an arrival, moreover, scheduled to coincide with the visitation of the Other, I may be summoned to postpone my relations with the Other (*Autrui*) and submit myself to the wider appeal of ‘society’ (*ET* 32). However, one must not take this as an indication that the face desists from persecuting me, nor that a ‘limitation’ has been placed upon my ‘anarchic responsibility’ (*OBBE* 159). Rather, in the name of justice I am obligated to ‘go beyond the straight line of justice’ (*TI* 245), and to attend to inequality in whatever form it takes (unless, of course, the form such injustice assumes is that of the nonhuman, in its innumerable forms).

Justice, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, ‘designates what needs to be rendered,’ what needs to be given to ‘each existing singular’ (Nancy, 2000, 186), where, in the case of the nonhuman creature, what needs to be attributed to them, I have argued, is the space within which they might be what they are, granting them the space within which to manifest themselves καθ’ αὐτό. Justice is that which is ‘circulated,’ or shared, and this ‘circulation’ extends ‘in all directions at once,’ Nancy argues (Nancy, 2000, 3), thus mollifying the intensity of the Other’s gaze, and re-plotting the coordinates of ethical space in alignment with this tertial axis. The third party moderates my relationship with the Other (*Autrui*) in order that my resources might be shared more equitably. Proto-ethical portage is thus crossed with ethical *partage* as I give of myself more judiciously (such giving, we recall, being middle voiced for I give  $\chi$  am given by  $\chi$  to the Other because I am ‘created’ by them). I am, accordingly, and in an ethical transliteration of the bacchanalian, ‘animated’ multiply and inspired by a profusion of others – I am a host to many. One might say, in keeping with Levinas’ numerous references to Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Verlaine (hardly the most abstemious of poets), that I am proto-ethically profligate, a fool for justice, one possessed (is the soul not, after all, a ‘seed of folly,’ as Levinas professes (*OBBE* 142)?). Indeed, Levinas will argue that the ‘foundation of consciousness is justice,’ and, similarly, that the apparition of the third party is the ‘very origin of appearing,’ that is to say ‘the very origin of an origin’ (*OBBE* 160).



Let us be clear. The advent of the 'third' presupposes both the 'cutting up' (*découpage*) of ethical space into discrete terms (*OBBE* 157; *AE* 245) – the third thus fissures the field of proto-ethical responsibility, effecting its very own *dé-claustration* of it – and the inauguration of an order of co-presence into which the plot of ethical 'intrigue' is woven. Such co-presence, or placial contiguity (*contiguïté*), marks the inception of consciousness qua conscience. The third 'appoints' me (where the Other 'dis-appoints me) establishing a common place or *terrain commun* (*AE* 250) between the Other, others and myself. This vacillation (the alternation between disappointment and appointment) defines the amphibological subject in its irreducible ambiguity. The strictures of Levinas' presentation of the face are, one might say, both heightened and relaxed in *Otherwise than Being*, therefore. For in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas will concede that a face 'shows itself between transcendence and visibility/invisibility' (*OBBE* 158). The interval of 'separation' nonetheless sanctifies this exchange, because the alternance of the face, which sets the face 'in relationship' with other 'faces' (*OBBE* 158), draws its charge from the signification of the 'one-for-the-other' (*l'un-pour-l'autre*) accomplished in, and through, the ordeal of proto-ethical subrogation. There can be no escaping the fact that, for Levinas, then, phenomenality is produced in and as signification (*OBBE* 160).

The singularity of the face is betrayed (*se trahit*) by its very own plural appeal. Hence, the 'event' of the third party is not 'empirical' (*OBBE* 158), in the sense that its legitimacy does not depend upon there being someone, or something, else present before, or between, myself and the one who faces me. Rather, it is as if the ethical dis-structure (*déstructure*) were complicit in its own de-structuration. Ethical space dismantles and reassembles itself recurrently, it appears. Furthermore, this structural 'ambivalence' is the proper theme of philosophical enquiry. It is as such that philosophy is 'called upon' to conceive the situation of its birth in 'several,' and not just two, 'times' (*plusieurs temps*) (*OBBE* 162; *AE* 252). Philosophy is born from the attempt to do justice to the exigencies and complexities that typify this extraordinary commerce between the an-archy of proximity, and the pursuit of principia, or ἀρχαί, by which justice might itself be served. Philosophy, Levinas asserts, is this very 'measure' (*mesure*) brought to bear on the 'infinity of the being-for-the-other of proximity' (*OBBE* 161; *AE* 251).

That the face is, as one might say, singularly plural, is once again confirmed by Levinas in the essay 'Peace and Proximity' (1984), where he acknowledges, paying homage to Vassili Grossman's *Vie et Destin*, that the 'face is not exclusively a human face,' because it may signify as 'families, wives, and parents' (PP 167). The face is thereby both the neighbour and the 'face of faces,' both 'visage' and 'visible,' the condition, or very 'fact of seeing' (OBBE 160-161), and an opacity impervious to sight. However, this alternance in several times (*plusieurs temps*) – an alternance susceptible to phenomenological disquisition – is unsettled by what I will call Levinas' lapsed theology, a commitment to theological thinking, despite Levinas' repudiation of such charges, out-of-phase with itself, its time, and its work, and as such both anachronous and atopic. The distribution of justice, and the ethical 'anamnesis' which permits me to 'recall' my status as a 'citizen' among citizens, are delivered, Levinas argues, "with the help of God" (OBBE 160) and "thanks to God" (OBBE 158). God, it seems, equilibrates the ethical for-structure (*Fürstruktur*), ensuring that the 'plot hatched in proximity' (OBBE 162), and the distance it delimits, remain uncontaminated by the lateral transit to which they are subjected by the third party.

What Levinas will call, the 'angelic order of justice' (OBBE 161), irrupts into Being, by the grace of God (*grace à Dieu*). God assumes the elusive form within Levinas' work of a 'trace' (*trace*), ἵχνος, or cleft, which striates thought, preventing thought from ever finally being adequate to the comprehension of the other person. As such, Levinas' work appears somewhat rarefied and lofty, perhaps lacking a sufficient 'foothold' in being (*pied dans l'être*), or a *fuss* in φύσις, to be eligible to qualify as a phenomenology of terrene life. But does such a lapsed theology not attest to a certain *lapsus* at the heart of the vigilance upon which philosophy, according to Levinas, is supposedly founded (it is God, Levinas insists, that '*founds* the eminence of visitation' (MS 61; emphasis added)). Is God, even if conceived under the illustrious sign of 'illeity,' not an unnecessary pleonasm in philosophical thought, a mere *flatus vocis*; and is Levinas' thought not left, as it were, coasting on the eddies of its own flatus? Moreover, when Levinas confers that, in the interest of justice, the dis-inter-estedness of the 'saying' is 'fixed in a said,' a said which becomes, he adds, a 'book' (*livre*), a 'law' (*droit*), and a 'science' (*science*) (OBBE 159; AE 247), is he not minimizing the slippage between the an-archic, and the subsequent ἀρχαί of its delivery, by fixing the format of the 'said' in a remarkably Jewish, or Talmudic,

constellation of terms? Certainly, Levinas' 'mission statement' is unequivocal on this point: 'my concern everywhere is precisely to translate the non-Hellenism of the Bible into Hellenic terms,' he insists (QA 85). Such 'translation' invariably encroaches upon the prestigious site of the philosophical λόγος, although it cannot quite oust it from its residency, because philosophy, Levinas will argue, is 'spoken in Greek' (QA 85). But is this peculiarly JewχGreek admixture, or κρᾶσις, not skewed in favour of its Jewish phylogeny? Can philosophy (φιλοσοφία) preserve its commitment to the phenomena (φαινόμενα), and honour them in their manifestative being, if its dignity is compromised by theological missives? Must philosophy not, by its very nature as 'measure [measure]' (AE 251), eschew all things divine (θεῖον), unless, that is, all things are somehow divine? Levinas, of course, famously defines philosophy as 'the wisdom of love at the service of love [*sagesse de l'amour au service de l'amour*]' (OBBE 162; AE 253), love, here, being the (Jewish) salve remedial for (Greek) thought. To be sure, the positive religion of Judaism does not own the deeds to 'love,' nor guarantee love safe passage through the turbulence of so called 'secular' history. But what one can say with Levinas, is that philosophy, so conceived as the measured application of love, exceeds its own 'origin' (ἀρχή) in and through a continuous and effusive movement of generation. Philosophy thus 'arouses a drama between philosophers' (*drame entre philosophes*), a drama 'sketched out' (*dessine*) concretely as the 'history of philosophy [*histoire de la philosophie*]' (OBBE 20; AE 39), a certain history in which the interplay between subject, Other, and others is structurally rudimentary, enlivening philosophy in its interminable methodological adventure.

If philosophy, as Husserl intimates, is to 'exercise its function' as that which is 'archontic' for European 'civilization' as a whole (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 289), if, that is, philosophy is to fulfil its 'function' of 'putting itself,' and thereby 'a genuine humanity,' on the royal 'road to realization' (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 291), then it must, Levinas believes, entertain the infidel (that is, entertain the *fremd*) at the heart of its enterprise. The 'crisis' to be allayed by philosophy, the 'crisis of European existence,' as such (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 299), can only be addressed, *pace* Husserl, if 'Europe' recognizes the conflux of its Biblical and Greek heritage. This, in turn, necessitates that philosophy welcome a Jewish interloper among its ranks. 'Europe,' Levinas affirms, is the 'concreteness where theoretical and Biblical wisdom do better than converge' (PP 168). The confluence of Biblical and Greek heritage begets the

'drama' (*drame*) of philosophy as ethical deaconship. A drama which can only be conceived against the social horizon, or tertial axis, of the third party (*le tiers*) whose presence ensures that the conditions of justice are met, even if its accomplishment is, de facto, impossible. Philosophy is, after all, an 'infinite task,' Husserl reminds us (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 291).

To be sure, Levinas' depiction of 'our' European heritage is undeniably simplistic, almost perversely so, and one wonders whether the 'Oriental thought' (*pensée orientale*) he banishes from his JewχGreek accord (*TI* 102; *TeI* 104) has not contributed more to 'our' philosophical heritage (and, what is more, to our very sense of heritage (*Sinnerbschaft*)) than he is prepared to admit. Indeed, Levinas is not always just in his dealings with heterodox philosophical traditions, and the model of pluralism he espouses in *Totality and Infinity* often falters hopelessly before the letter of its own teaching. Indeed, as Bernasconi notes, 'Levinas excludes the possibilities of most cultures from contributing to philosophy' (Bernasconi, 1995, 84). The entire project of ontologizing geographical topoi (τόποι) is, likewise, thwart with difficulties, and attests to what Husserl might call, despite being implicated in this very endeavour, a 'mathematization,' if not of 'Nature,' then certainly of natural and cultural boundaries. Even though the 'spiritual shape,' or 'style-form' of 'Europe' is, according to Husserl, 'supranational' (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 276), extending to parts of the Americas and other 'civilized' colonies, the delimitation of such boundaries is, it seems, a fairly arbitrary and unregulated affair, prone to trading in generalizations, not to mention dubious colonial assumptions. (As the rubric of 'continental' philosophy undoubtedly perpetuates an unhelpful rift between so called Anglo-American 'analytic' philosophy, and the syndicate of proper names: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Satre, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, etc., by which the discipline of philosophy is purportedly known in 'continental Europe.') At best, one derives a flavour for regional and cultural difference from the descriptions of 'our' 'European' heritage Husserl and Levinas promulgate, which is instructive, as we will discover in part three, to the extent that it permits one to ascertain the nature of the 'self evidences' that are operative in their thinking surrounding these issues, and to critique them as appropriate.

Of course, if philosophy is characterized by its 'infinition,' or heritability, its 'drama,' then the 'said' into which Levinas' thought inevitably congeals, is but one figure in an ongoing historico-philosophical programme. However, Levinas'

idiosyncratically Talmudic configuration of philosophy – his Yiddish phenomenology, one might say (a term we deploy here to convey both the disseminative nature of Levinas' thought, and its diasporic *Sitz-im-Leben*, and not to denote anything at all derogatory in importation) – itself represents a 'reactivation,' in a Husserlian sense (*Crisis* 361), and a 'repetition,' in a Heideggerian sense (*BT* §74 [385]), of the very JewχGreek admixture (κρᾶσις) Levinas commends in his work. What we elect to 'reactivate,' or 'renew,' from the store of wisdom Levinas has handed down to us, very much depends upon our willingness, or unwillingness, to condone his theological positings and to accept the philosophical miscegenation to which he gives voice. Any reluctance we might feel, for example, about admitting that most sanctified of Levinasian words, 'God,' into 'our' philosophical deliberations, does not undermine the importance, or quality, of Levinas' phenomenological analyses. Nor does it prevent us from acknowledging the quite legitimate challenge to Greek autarky in philosophical thinking, posed by Levinas' Yiddish methodological provocations.

The heritability of Levinasian thought, together with Levinas' emphasis upon the iterance, iterability, and irritability of philosophical practice (*OBBE* 143), enable him to argue, with some degree of persuasion, that the ambit of my responsibility extends beyond the here-and-now (*hic et nunc*) of my time to include future generations. The Other, as we recall, makes such a 'passage' possible (*MS* 50), 'filiation' being the name Levinas gives to the relation I have with what lies beyond the confines of my death (in Levinas' terms my 'son' (*fil*s)). Unlike Dasein, for whom death is principally the 'possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there [*Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens*]' and before which 'all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone [*alle Bezüge zu anderem Dasein gelöst*]' (*BT* §50 [250]), *me voici* is always underway (*Unterwegs*): there is no *scène à faire* to the production of ethical life. In the wake of the third party, the concept of filiation is broadened to incorporate a more generous distribution of responsibility; the ethical body is at once a liturgical body shared generatively with others – the seed-bed (*semis*), or bed-rock (*soubassement*), for the disseminative campaign of proto-ethics. The 'for,' of my being for-the-other, obligates me 'to be for a time that would be without me,' for a 'time after my time' (*MS* 50). In the face of the Other (*Autrui*), I am summoned by others (*autres*) whose time has not yet come, yet whose gaze 'persecutes' me from beyond the order of my life. One may need, in this instance, to speak of inter-



finitude, then. Since finitude, properly conceived under the jurisdiction of infinity, is, a fortiori, shared. There is, indeed, a 'prophetism' to be glimpsed here (*ETE* 112), one whose truth is free from the hokum of the supernatural and the psychical, a 'prophetism' that attests to the very temporality of time as a passage to the time of others. Time is achieved as dissemination, and what is disseminated is my self. Qua responsal, I am quite prodigious, therefore. Dedication, as such, is a trans-epochal phenomenon, truly heritable in scope. Indeed, the third party circumscribes the space of proto-ethical encounter, extending the contours of its range, because in the face of the Other (the singularly-plural 'one') the 'history of humanity,' in which 'I have never participated,' obsesses me. I am, henceforth, responsible for 'the past of the other' (*PJL* 176). The source-point of internal time consciousness is betrayed by a past that is not its own and which is immune to recuperation, a past which lies beyond the specious frozen present to which Husserl ultimately reduces consciousness and with it time (at least in so far as Husserl is content to settle for a genetic phenomenology, which he is arguably loathe to do, if the analyses of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on Intersubjectivity* are anything to go by).

Yet, despite this heritability (defined, one could say, in terms of the three 'ecstases' of responsibility), Levinas will persist in his attempt to locate a transcendental signifier amidst the flux of historico-cultural ephemera. This 'transcendental,' needless to say, is encoded within and by the phrase, the Good (*le Bien*), and set to work throughout Levinas' various *opera*. But how can such a notion be substantiated, and, what is more, drawn down from its unlikely resting place in some eikonic (viz., Platonic) realm of ideality? Can one really defend a notion of the 'Good' that transcends the horizons of heritability? If the 'Good' is the 'most profound teaching [*enseignement le plus profond*]' – the most 'definitive teaching [*enseignement definitive*]' – of 'philosophy' (*TI* 103; *TeI* 106), and if the 'Good' is quite beyond Being, then can philosophy maintain its separation from theology and keep its distance from the kind of opinion (*δόξα*) it sought to overcome (and seeks to overcome to this day) in its inauguratory (Greek) phase? To be sure, the 'Good' may be readily characterized as an orientation, a denotation to which we may submit with ease. However, as an orientation, or bearing within being, the 'Good' remains bound to the horizons of its constitution and indebted to the transference of sense (*transfert du sense*) or *Sinnübertragung*, through which it is accomplished. In order to argue

otherwise (*autrement*), Levinas will be forced to transgress the limits of both finite being (*Dasein*), and inter-finite being (filiation), and install within his thought a sense of the 'Infinite' that exceeds the remits of phenomenological explication. Clearly this is a perilous move, and it is at this point that many of Levinas' readers will lose heart and falter in their approval of his work.

But wait, perhaps we are overly hasty in our assessment of Levinas. Is our argument not itself fallacious? Do we not commit the fallacy of conflating the 'Good beyond Being' with some 'ideal' transposed to a world behind the world, to some 'υπερουράνιος τόπος'? Surely by the 'Good,' Levinas wishes to alert us to that which transcends impulse, drive, and will, in short, to that which surpasses conation. The 'Good' is both the name for that which summons, or awakens, me from my life of self-interest, and my taking upon myself the 'whole suffering of the world' (*MT* 89). The 'Good' is the good beyond being (φύσις), where being, as we will discover proximately, is deemed by Levinas to be defined principally by its inter-essement. The 'Good' is 'nothing more than this *apogee* in being [*n'est que cet apogée dans l'être*],' Levinas avers (*MT* 90; *TM* 130). The 'Good' is at the furthest remove from φύσις; as the apogee of a star, or planet, describes the point at which it is furthest from the earth. The 'Good' is thus that by which one orientates oneself in being, as a mariner might orient him or herself by the stars. Of course, it is precisely this sense of orientation that we have sought to elucidate in the present chapter, taking our own bearings from Levinas' account of the staging (*mise-en-scène*) of ethical space.

Just as the stars were once thought to be fixed in a solid sphere surrounding the earth (a theory later disproved), Levinas believes the 'Good' to be equally firmamental, conceiving it as a 'fixed point exterior to society' (*ET* 32). It is this fixity, and the intractability by which it is characterized, that ultimately prevents the 'world' (*monde*) from plunging headlong into the abyssal depths of the *il y a*. However, what sense are we to make of such a claim? Again, unless we broach the possibility of a trans-epochal, inter-cultural, interpretation of the 'Good' (a sound phenomenological proposal), Levinas' 'fixed point' begins to appear more and more susceptible to dis-aster (*dés-astre*), and less and less capable of charting 'ethical' life in its unceasing complexity. If what is at issue is 'an order where the very notion of the Good first takes on meaning;' thus, if what is at issue is broadly speaking 'society' (*TI* 103), how can Levinas attribute fixity to his principle of the 'Good' without abrogating his commitment to social life? To be sure, the detour through the

third party, whether conceived as a third individual or raised to the level of culture, entails that one construe the 'Good' as the product of an ongoing, inter-societal, act of meaning bestowal. Phenomenologically considered, the 'Good' is only a 'fixed point' relative to where one stands, bearing in mind that where one stands is merely a temporary *pied à terre* on a collaborative journey of ascent toward the 'Good.' Paradoxically then, qua transcendental, the 'Good' distributes sense, yet its sense is distributed by those who assent to it, renewing, repeating and regenerating its 'meaning' through the embodiment of various levels of socio-cultural practice. Perhaps, then, as Jean-Luc Nancy affirms, 'community' is itself 'transcendence' (community represents a 'resistance to immanence') because it is an 'infinite task at the heart of finitude' (Nancy, 1991, 35), and not because it is the bearer of divinely revealed teachings. The torsion, or 'twisting back on itself of the Self [*la torsion sur soi – du Moi*]' (MT 90; TM 130), which, Levinas believes, epitomizes the 'messianicity' of the responsible subject, therefore not only designates the subject's 'power to bear the suffering of all' (MT 90), as Levinas suggests, but also accents an irrepressible tension between the orders of ethical and proto-ethical being. We turn now to consider this tension in more detail.

## **Part II**

### **The Regulation of Ethical Space: The provocation of the face and the limits of signification**

### 3. DELIMITATION

In an early essay, 'Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme' (1934), an essay in many ways portentous of world-historical events to come, Levinas proffers an analysis of Hitlerian anthropology, probing the genesis of its leading concepts and problematizing the logic of race upon which the regime, to which it gave rise, is founded. Of particular interest to Levinas is the role ascribed to the body in Hitlerian thought, for the corporeal dimension of human being assumes a foundational significance within Hitlerian ideology. Notably, the Hitlerian doctrine of 'Man' places emphasis upon man's adherence to himself, an adherence, moreover which 'one does not escape' (*on n'échappe*) (RPH 68; QRPH 18). 'Man's essence,' Levinas observes, 'no longer lies in freedom,' as the reigning idealisms would contend, but rather 'in a kind of bondage' (*dans une espèce d'enchaînement*). Thus, Levinas continues:

The importance attributed to this feeling for the body, with which the Western Spirit has never wished to content itself, is at the basis of a new conception of man. The biological, with the notion of inevitability it entails, becomes more than an object of spiritual life. It becomes its heart. The mysterious urgings of the blood, the appeals of heredity and the past for which the body serves as an enigmatic vehicle, lose the character of being problems [...] From this point on, every social structure that announces an emancipation with respect to the body, without being committed to it, is suspected of being a repudiation or a betrayal (RPH 69).

To attain one's true or authentic 'self' thus means to become cognisant of the 'ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies; and above all else to accept this chaining' (*l'enchaînement original inéluctable, unique à notre corps*) as basic to one's being (RPH 69; QRPH 19).

In my reading of Levinas I have sought to highlight the generative dimension of the latter's thought and have deliberately accentuated the themes of 'filiation,' 'fraternity,' 'fecundity,' and 'teaching,' adapting them beyond the strictures of their presentation in Levinas' work, in order to question the legitimacy of Levinas' delimitation of ethical space. The account of phenomenological heredity outlined in part one, differs markedly from the kind of heredity based on consanguinity



promulgated by Hitler and subsequently condemned by Levinas above. No doubt, Levinas would be wary of a number of the proposals I have ventured and perhaps, above all, of the terms in which they are dispatched. However, I believe I have remained loyal to the spirit of Levinas' own thinking, if not always to the letter, despite contesting his management of the field ethics and undermining the cogency of his method in places.

In part one, my aim was to bring the face into relief against the horizons of its institution and to set forth, in a preparatory fashion, the conditions under which it might signify as a face. This aim led to my exhibiting the face upon the ground of its heritability. In part two, through an elaboration of the themata under scrutiny, the injunctive environment of the face-to-face relation will be brought to light and the terms of its assembly further clarified. The susceptibility of the subject, it will be maintained, is primed pedagogically. One is *initiated into* an appreciation to and for the face (a predicament in which one *comes to accept* the face, and its mandate, as morally binding) through the acquisition of a schema (σχῆμα), by and according to which one regulates one's comportment vis-à-vis others. In the disquisition that follows, I shall attempt to trace the face back to the situation of its birth (the genesis of signification) with a view to problematizing the figure in which it is instantiated within the work of Levinas. The foregoing examination of the face has compelled me to question the determination of the subject (*le sujet*) within Levinasian thought and it is to a consideration of the subject in its susception that I now turn.

### § 13. *The vestiges of volition*

The various analyses of the body Levinas presents throughout his work, most notably to be found in *Otherwise than Being*, take as their point of departure themes adumbrated in the early essay on Hitlerism: principally, the notion of identity as an encumbrance or enchainment to oneself. To be sure, the early opuscula, *Of Evasion* and *Existence and Existents*, dedicate themselves to an explication of the problems of being riveted or held fast by being and the related 'need' for excendence issuing from this initial stance. Indeed, the motif of 'enchainment' is basal to Levinas' project and is deployed in various guises throughout his career, culminating in the situation of ethical claustrophobia detailed at length in *Otherwise than Being*. Hitler's biologism, of course, subjects the human to the sovereignty of race and the

finality of mythico-nationalistic determinations of heritage, determinations, needless to say, wholly at odds with the ethical seriation Levinas describes under the heading of what Derrida will call, Levinas' 'family schema' (Derrida, 1997, viii). Although both the 'philosophy' of Hitlerism and Levinasian *philosophie première* share a concern for 'propagation' (propagation), and harbour a suspicion of 'freedom,' the universality concomitant with racism strives to exert itself through expansion and the application of force (*RFH* 70), while it is the responsibilities of the ethical subject that increase and the compass of its obligation that expands. Let us be clear: the genealogy to which Levinas submits himself is, like the fundamental ontology of Heidegger, for whom the 'existential analytic comes before any biological account of human 'life'' (*BT* §9 [45]), ethical and phenomenological, and not biological.

In Levinas' thought the 'biological' is repeatedly reduced to its ethical signification. Indeed, so much so that the status of the body in Levinas' work is often unclear. The precise nature of the accord between *bios* (βίος) and *psyche* (ψυχή) is therefore moot, as we shall discover. Certainly, in *Existence and Existents*, the localization of consciousness in the body is tantamount to the very 'subjectivization of the subject' (*EE* 69). Furthermore, the body is conceived there as the very 'advent of consciousness' (*EE* 71), a veritable event rather than the mere expression or simulacrum of one. In *Totality and Infinity*, the body is the site of a fundamental ambiguity or ambivalence. It is both that *by which* one establishes oneself in being and *from which* one enjoys the *nourritures* of elemental life, and that *in which* one is mired or steeped in what is other – the density of the element that envelops one (*TI* 164). Hence the body is at once a 'sector of elemental reality,' and also that which enables one to grasp the world around one and enjoy the fruits of one's 'labour' (*TI* 165). These insights allow Levinas to advance the thesis that thought is breached at its source (ἀρχή) by sensibility. The sensible is not simply that upon which sense is bestowed, but that which conditions and sustains thought; a situation that attests to a reversal in the priority of constitutional activity.

During the period of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas' understanding of the body and its significance is illustrated by the following series of remarks: 'consciousness,' Levinas asserts, 'does not fall into a body – is not incarnate, it is a disincarnation – or, more exactly, a postponing of the corporeity of the body' (*TI* 165-166). In the order of Levinas' phenomenology, 'consciousness,' as we have seen, is not primordial. One is first exposed and subsequently then conscious. The 'I' arrives late

for the *rendez-vous* with the Other and is disbarred from rejoining itself in identity or auto-identification. The 'field' of exposedness, the (non) lieu of pre-originary trauma, subtends the region of pure consciousness in Levinas' thinking. The body is thus designated by Levinas as the 'very regime in which separation holds sway [*le régime même sous le quell s'exerce la séparation*]' (TI 163; Tel 176). The 'how' (*comment*) of separation is construed adverbially rather than substantively, since 'sensitivity enacts the very separation of being' (TI 138).

Now, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas cautions his readers against conflating his deductions with the teachings of dualism. The ego does not, therefore, 'hold sway' in the body qua constituting *Ichpol*, for the body is first and foremost the event (*événement*) where 'separation' comes to pass. I am, henceforth, most immediately present to myself in the sensuous experience I have of myself as an embodied subject. In *Totality and Infinity*, the 'plane of the inner life' is understood by Levinas as an 'apology' (TI 240). The being of signification amounts, thus, to a contestation of one's very place in the sun. One quits the order of interiority by offering oneself to the Other. The self is offerable, one might say.

Yet, this account retains a sense in which I am confirmed in my singularity precisely to the extent that I 'purge' myself of my position in being. I 'am' through my 'effort' to purge myself of myself (TI 245). My abnegation of my self is the most rudimentary form of self-experience I have. Auto-affection is auto-ejection, one might suggest. I am given (or revealed) to myself as I give myself away. However, such 'purgation,' also termed 'goodness' (*bonté*) by Levinas, invariably depends upon my willingness to subordinate my 'will' or 'desire' to persist in the enjoyment of my being to the ethically motivated 'Desire' to be for the Other person. Volition, albeit 'inspired' by the Other, survives into the responsibility by which I am affirmed in my apologetic position, therefore. This is problematic for Levinas to the degree that the primacy of volitional activity is left (virtually) intact in his early presentation of moral life. Thus it appears that although it is 'through morality alone' that 'I and the Others are *produced* in the universe,' the production in question is itself the product of volitional activity (TI 245); 'activity,' which, even according to the sublation of the distinction between 'activity' and passivity' broached by Levinas in his later work, must itself be purged (*se vidé*) from the description of ethically reduced subjectivity. The analyses of *Totality and Infinity* do not probe deep enough

in their excavation of the field of subjective being, a further 'disqualification' of apology is required, it would appear (*OBBE* 121).

The trope of 'passivity' is, one might say, the literal sense of the body for Levinas, and this reflects a shift in the denotation of the concept of 'welcome' (*accueil*) between the periods of Levinas' two major works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. In *Totality and Infinity*, a certain virility defines the notion of welcome despite the association of *accueil* with 'feminine' being (although, let us take heed, a non-biologically determined femininity intended to designate an ontological 'domain' rather than to suggest 'woman' or 'women' in their concrete and gendered particularity). Evidently, the will to receive the Other into the domiciliary space of one's 'home,' differs from the will (*voulois*) understood as *potens* or power. To host is to act and to assume, but such assumption does not involve a will to dominate the Other, but instead to accommodate them in their indigence.

However, in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas is resolved to expedite the last remnants of receptivity from his account of sensibility. Sensibility is immediately subjection, a pure undergoing or *pur subir*. I do not, therefore, assume the Other, as if I occupied a 'position' I was only too happy to concede, and subsequently to relinquish, because I am always already under accusation. My 'position' is always already under erasure:

A neighbour concerns me outside of any a priori. But perhaps before every a priori, or from an earlier moment than that of the a priori. This is the notion all our inquiry means to bring out, so as to reach the concept of an absolute passivity. Receptivity with regard to the given, a modality of cognition, is not adequate for it, for precisely the a priori that cannot be excluded from it lets all the weight of the given be *welcomed*. This would still be an act (*OBBE* 192n.20).

Despite being in many ways prior to both volition and activity, the conception of donation operative throughout *Totality and Infinity* does not break decisively with the potency of *pouvoir*. I remain capable of assuming the Other and it is this capacity by which my uniqueness qua 'me' is affirmed. Perhaps the transition between what we might call the active-passivity of *Totality and Infinity*, and the passive-passivity (beyond the apriority of the receptivity characteristic of the doctrine of the

Schematism in Kant) of *Otherwise than Being*, is reflected in the matrifocal logic that dominates the latter work. The *fil* of filiation, in *Totality and Infinity*, is the 'thread' of my loins qua pater. Even if the son (*le fils*) who issues from my loins is separated from me, and thus remains forever *loin* or faraway, 'he' is nonetheless 'my' son and I inhere in 'him,' despite maintaining my difference *from* him. The paternity (*paternité*) discussed in the fourth section of *Totality and Infinity* under the title 'Beyond the face' (*Au-Delà du Visage*), is a little too robust (like the 'quasimuscular "I think"' in which Levinas believes Husserl's analyses of the lived body culminate (*IS* 148)), and a little too secure in its status as progenitrix to accommodate the Other *in ventre*. Paternity, it seems, at least according to the phenomenology of production advanced in *Totality and Infinity*, engenders, it does not bear. As such, the Other's 'pain' is *kept at bay*, or at arms length, something I might endure were I appropriately motivated, because 'he' proceeds me (even if 'he' is a 'she' and filiation, being non-gender specific, Levinas urges, is also what we might call filleation).

If signification is sensibility (*OBBE* 67), then being-for-the-Other entails more than the simple forbearance (or *active* restraint) of 'fatherhood,' but involves, simultaneously, the patience of motherhood, where the patience in question is the patience of portage conceived, as it were, immaculately (*sans père*), or at least before the father. Perhaps, then, one ought to read the sections on sensibility, to be found in chapter three of *Otherwise than Being*, concurrently with section four of *Totality and Infinity*, in order to grasp the apriority of 'maternity' with respect to 'paternity,' in order, that is, to grasp the fact that the account of paternity contained in the earlier work is itself matroclinous, depending for its sense upon the prior (although chronologically posterior) matrix of the 'concept' of maternity to nurture and sustain it. Hence Levinas will declare 'maternity,' in the complete 'being for the other,' to be the 'ultimate sense' of ethics (*OBBE* 108). First philosophy is, one might hasten to conclude, matronymic. The 'father' is always his~~x~~her mother's son~~x~~daughter. The ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας may father the face but it is the matrix of the sensible that bears it, a point to which we will return in the conclusion to our study of Levinas.

Prior, thus, to the bipolarity of activity and passivity, free will and determinism, the passivity of supporting by which the subject is confirmed in its being places the event of subjectivation outside the order of presence and beyond the reach of recuperation. As noted earlier, auto-affection is hetero-affection. The



condition, or as Levinas would say, the uncondition, of my presence to myself has its origin in my being obsessed by another. I am out of phase (out of joint) with myself and as such 'senescent' (*OBBE* 52). I age because time lags. I do not coincide with myself in the present, but recur on the hither side of my point of departure.

The 'Good' chose me first before I was 'in a position to choose' or 'welcome its choice,' such electability attesting to my 'pre-originary susceptiveness [*ma susception pré-originnaire*],' Levinas insists (*OBBE* 122; *AE* 195). The 'Good' assigns me to myself to the extent that I am 'obliged without this obligation having begun in me' (*OBBE* 12; emphasis added). The element of consciousness is thereby not the 'setting' or *mise-en-scène* for the encounter with the Other. The movement back from the synchrony of the said to the anachronical saying that precedes it, effects a reduction beyond consciousness to its hither side, the (non)lieu and (a)topos of the properly human. Consciousness no longer returns to itself, for the consolidation guaranteed by such a regressive movement is denied it. 'Homelife' will never be the same again (and again), one must conclude, since the reduction to the saying beyond perseverance in being breaks up the identity of ego, de-posing it and exposing it to the trauma of the 'outside' (*OBBE* 182). The noematic core of intentional activity is, Levinas maintains, turned inside out 'like a cloak' (*comme une veste*) (*OBBE* 48; *AE* 82). My being turned to another is my being turned inside out, as if the papered walls of my 'home' already faced outwards to the clamour of the street, rendering me vulnerable to the inclemency of weather and passers by alike. The dwelling secured against the elemental does not protect one from the Other. Rather, with Derrida we might say that 'the dwelling opens itself to itself' (Derrida, 1999, 41): The alien is already in one's midst, the home a 'concave without a convex [*envers sans endroit*]' (*OBBE* 49; *AE* 83). I am at once both 'host,' and 'hostage,' therefore, providing, that is, one recognises that the simultaneity which marks this conjunction of terms is itself freighted diachronically; a middle voiced diffusion of tense on the hither side (*en deçà*) of the distinction between activity and passivity. As Levinas explains:

The reverting of the ego into a self...is the very modality of disinterestedness. It has the form of a corporeal life devoted to expression and to giving. *It is devoted, and does not devote itself (vouée et non pas se vouant): it is a self despite itself (un soi malgré soi)*, in incarnation, where it is the

possibility of offering, suffering and trauma (*OBBE* 50; *AE* 86; emphasis added)

Sensibility defines the subject in its subjectivity and attests to its pre-originary exposedness; pre-originary because prior to the initiative of the ego and prior to what might be assembled by representational or recollective acts. Corporeality is thus to be understood in terms of patience, and not in terms of that by and through which I can negotiate the complexities of my environment (Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger) and fulfil the empty intuitions of intentional life (Husserl).

Of course, Levinas' account of the body is not figurative (although the *figura* of the face modifies the corporeal schema) because, as he puts it, 'being is ordained to height' (*MS* 57). The body, as such, conceals a dimension 'more material than all matter' (*OBBE* 109). But what does Levinas mean here? Surely such remarks require elucidation. After all, the proposal that the Good 'chooses me' prior to my choosing it, does not offer itself easily to understanding. We must interrogate these suggestions further, therefore, not least because Levinas provides his readers with a dearth of concrete examples with which to grasp his excruciatingly complex arguments. If 'no one is good voluntarily' (*ED* 117), as Levinas adverts, then is 'ethics' not at base reduced to a form of quietism? In short, one must answer 'no.' But, one might be forgiven for thinking so from the descriptions Levinas assays. We must examine this issue more closely, then, in order to guard against the possible misunderstanding which so readily confronts us here.

#### § 14. *Susceptibility*

In the essay 'Substitution' (1968), and with a view to fixing the sense (*sens*) of freedom in its determination as transcendence, Levinas will advance the following by way of clarification. 'Let us suppose for a moment that the ego is free and capable of deciding in favour of solidarity with others,' he suggests, 'at least it will be recognised that this freedom has no time to assume this urgent weight and that, consequently, it appears collapsed and defeated under its suffering' (*S* 95). Central to appreciating the import of Levinas' comments here is the notion that the time of deliberation and debate, the time which would permit the ego to retain a certain amount of composure before the choices that assail it, is itself temporised by the surfeit of responsibilities to which the ego is subjected, *ab origine*. There is, Levinas

will have us believe, *no time in which to accept* this burden, for the time internal to consciousness, and characterized by the unceasing play of protensions and retensions, is interrupted by that which precedes the reflective gaze of consciousness upon its own contents (reflection *takes time*) and exceeds the sphere of absolute origins Husserl deems to be accessible to 'insightful inquiry [*schauenden Forschung*]' (*Id* §55 [107]). If the cogito, qua site, is the place where the mind exists as ἀρχή, that is as a beginning, then the situation to which Levinas alerts us is anarchic, since the events it recounts threaten the tenure of consciousness by preventing it from retaining, modifying and constituting that which afflicts it.

If, according to the stipulations of Husserl in *Ideas I*, 'every positing begins with a *point of initiation*,' a '*positional point of origin*' (*Id* §122 [253]), as it were, then responsibility, apropos of Levinas, is not posited, but instead suffered. The self-initiating spontaneity, *sua sponte*, enjoyed by the pure Ego (*reines Ich*), is denied the Levinasian subject. The 'I' does not rejoin itself in synchrony: positional consciousness is desituated. Rather than being an ἀρχή, the 'sphere' or 'field' of consciousness is disturbed by that which punctuates the fringes of its intentional life. Phenomenology may well be the 'maternal ground' (*Mutterboden*) of philosophical method (Husserl, *Ideas III*, §15 [80]), however, the matrix to which Levinas leads his readers back is that sense of 'maternity' (*maternité*) that defines the subject in its pre-originary susceptibility. The oneself is a late-comer, one might say, a laggard who arrives late to, and subsequently misses, her own 'beginning,' only to discover the echo of the neighbour's cries already ringing her ears (of the maladies endured by *me voici*, to which we will return proximately, one may perhaps number tinnitus as among the most acute).

As intimated, one of the problems that besets explication of such issues is the lack of concretion accorded them in Levinas' writings. Efforts to concretize Levinas' arguments meet with a certain amount of resistance, since the arguments he promulgates refuse to lend themselves to commonplace exempla and spurn elucidation. Holding the door open for someone and muttering 'Après-vous' as one does so (an oft quoted Levinas attempt at concretion) hardly clarifies matters, nor translates *in concreto* hundreds of pages of dense and often protracted prose. Furthermore, the examples one might cite to derive some sense from the 'anarchic' proposals outlined by Levinas, would no doubt be rejected by him for being inimical to the 'plot' of ethics.

If the non-intentional, non-conscious trace of the 'immemorial' striates consciousness, and yet as such undoes the 'categories of mechanism' (BPW 183n.42), we cannot, in so far as we wish to adhere to Levinas' own 'teaching,' proffer an interpretation of susceptibility based upon the subject following a rule of conduct instituted for it in conformity with socially generated axiological norms. After all, morality *precedes* culture, Levinas avers (MS 57). Moreover, such a reading leaves the subject free to follow or ignore the imperatives that govern the social relationships within the home-world (*Heimwelt*) to which is submitted. Susceptibility is not algorithmic, therefore. One cannot argue that a subject cedes to another, in this instance, that a subject opens a door for another, simply because they are acting in accordance with established societal mores that arbitrate proper conduct on such occasions. Susceptibility, Levinas will maintain, is anterior to the sedimentation of 'values' within a subject's field of comportment. Hence, as Waldenfels observes, Levinas arguably invites us to treat 'our whole sensorium as a responsorium' (Waldenfels, 2002, 77). The phenomenal field is a field of exposedness.

The descriptions of susception Levinas sets forth represent, in many ways, what we might term the overdetermination (*surdétermination*) of concrete situations and encounters. Day-to-day charity and kindness, the small mercy (*la petite bonté*) of letting the other person pass first through a crowded street despite one's own haste, accomplishes, concretely, the proto-ethical (dis)structure Levinas endeavours to isolate under the heading of 'susceptibility.'

In book three of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between actions that are 'intended' or 'voluntary' (ἐκούσιον) and those that are 'unintended' or 'involuntary' (ἀκούσιον). A subject acts voluntarily if 'the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions' resides in the subject, and the 'things of which the moving principle is in' a subject, are in that subject's 'power to do or not to do' (Aristotle, 1925, 1110a 10). An involuntary action is one that takes place owing to ignorance or as a result of compulsion. Significantly, both the terms voluntary (ἐκούσιον) and involuntary (ἀκούσιον), Aristotle insists, 'must be used with reference to the moment of action' itself (Aristotle, 1925, 1110a 10). Similarly, 'choice' (προαίρεσις), which is likewise voluntary, relates to the predicament of deliberation preceding an action and circumscribes that class of things that may be brought about by one's own effort: 'we deliberate about things

that are in our power and can be done,' he contends (Aristotle, 1925, 1112a 11). προαίρεσις thus entails the subjugation of appetitive drives (ὀρεχίς) to the principles of rationality and thought, which accounts for the fact, or so Aristotle believes, that 'choice is not common to irrational creatures' such as nonhuman animals (Aristotle, 1925, 1111b 1).

According to Aristotle, it is 'choice' that foreshadows the moment of action and predisposes the agent to act in consonance with rational, deliberative principles. Such ἀρχαί are, however, subjected to critique by Levinas for they afford the moral agent respite in the midst of the situation that confronts him, or her. Ethicality, Levinas will urge, is characterized by its 'restlessness' (*agitation*), rather than the sort of ataraxy (ἀταραξία) commended by Aristotle. Furthermore, the 'moment' of action upon which Aristotle bases his account of the voluntary (ἐκούσιον) and the involuntary (ἀκούσιον) is structured diachronically in the Levinasian presentation of susceptibility. The 'moment' is fissured, it no longer coincides with itself but is postponed indefinitely (infinitely deferred), demarcating the passage of that which has always already withdrawn from the clearing of the present. Of course, Aristotle deftly underscores what is at stake in any action that may be qualified as ἐκούσιον, namely that the 'body' (σώμα) of the one who acts voluntarily and by choice is animated by a series of rational principles to which that agent subscribes, such subscription taking place in the interval of deliberation that precedes all preferential activity. It is the nature of this animation that perturbs Levinas. For while he will maintain that sensibility is immediately rational (a proposition we have yet to corroborate), it is the other person who 'animates' the subject and not some abstract principle or law with which it aligns itself. Responsibility is, Levinas proffers, 'without deliberation' (*OBBE* 120).

In the first volume of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Husserl claims that the 'Ego' does not dwell passively in its positings but rather *generates* them, the latter radiating from the Ego which functions as their 'primal source.' Positing, as such, is the Ego's '*free spontaneity and activity*.' Moreover, Husserl continues, 'every act of no matter what species can begin in the mode of *spontaneity pertaining, so to speak, to its creative beginning* in which the pure Ego makes its appearance as the subject of the spontaneity' (*Id* §122 [253]). To be sure, Levinas contests the putative spontaneity underlined by Husserl here. The Ego, for Levinas, is not the initiating point of action and volition since qua origin it is deposed by the



other person. However, Husserl's analysis of the actional is instructive because it confirms that all positional activity or positing undergoes what he calls a 'modal alteration.' Every positional point of origination or initiation radiating out from the pure Ego is, Husserl argues, immediately 'converted into another mode.' For example, perceptual *seizing upon, taking hold of*, are immediately and without a break changed into the 'having in one's grip' (*Id* §122 [253]).

Now, we have hitherto noted that a similar and equally immediate (if not somewhat arcane) alteration obtains at the heart of susceptibility. Exposedness converts immediately into a being-exposed-for. One's being responsorial, to employ Waldenfels term, converts into one's being responsible for others. It is this modal alteration or conversion that has caused us to question the phenomenological viability of Levinas' project. Husserl's proposal is far easier to substantiate, of course, and although Levinas consistently disputes the tenancy of the pure Ego (*reines Ich*), undermining its dominant position as ἀρχή, his own account of susception is far from convincing. By what sophistical act, or according to what *licentia rabbinica*, is proto-ethical vulnerability, which, let us be clear, is purportedly proto 'ethical,' reprised as ethical responsibility? Certainly, the language deployed throughout Levinas' later works, language which Levinas deems to be defined by its 'over emphasis' (*OBBE* 119), struggles to resist the modal 'rehabilitation' accented here. As Levinas himself explains:

The ethical language we have resorted to does not arise out of a special moral experience, independent of the descriptions hitherto elaborated. The ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics (*OBBE* 120).

Be this as it may, 'ethical' language (by which I mean the language of agency, comportment, and regulation) does insinuate itself into the proto-ethical descriptions Levinas ventures. We thus more effortlessly from a salutary account of corporeality, and a considered disquisition of egology, to a (phenomenologically) unwarranted designation of vulnerability *as* responsibility. The reversion of 'thematization into anarchy' (*OBBE* 121) in the description of proximity Levinas assays (the reversion to the eversion or *turning inside-out* of the subject), is at once predicated upon the

‘evidence’ sanctioned by the modal conversion adumbrated above. But can this conversion be justified as such?

It is not entirely clear why, or indeed how, the ‘modification of maternity [*modification de la maternité*]’ (OBBE 75; AE 121) is accomplished *as* persecution, not to mention why (or how) maternity, which is ‘bearing par excellence’ (*le porter par excellence*) ought to commit one to bear responsibility for being ‘persecuted by the persecutor [*du persécuteur*]’ (OBBE 75; AE 121). One can accommodate Levinas’ suggestions that subjectivity is sensibility, and that sensibility, qua exposure, involves a ‘wounding’ of the kind of theoretical receptivity ascribed to the pure Ego by Husserl. One may even excuse the rhetorical excesses of Levinas’ prose, and the blustering descriptions he offers of susception as an expulsion from the site of oneself and a restlessness without hope of reprieve. However, to argue beyond the phenomenological lucidity of these descriptions, and endorse the flagrantly ‘religious’ proposition that as Levinas expresses it, ‘my basic posture is ‘the for-the-other’ (SaS 158), is to test the allegiance of readers perhaps otherwise sympathetic to the trajectory of Levinas’ thought, and to transport one, as Janicaud would say, ‘into the country of the ideal’ (Janicaud, 2000, 41).

It may be, of course, that *me voici* is subjected to the other, qua ‘persecuteur,’ much in the way that Dasein, according to Heidegger, is subjected to its ‘there’ (*Da*), and to thereby having to make sense of its Being and the Being of beings; a predicament upon which Dasein must continually project itself if it is realize its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This possibility for being ‘authentic’ (released, in however transitory a sense, from the ‘publicness’ of the ‘They’ (*das Man*)) is something Dasein must continually *choose*: ‘Because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself’ (BT §9 [42]). However, the choice whether to have to make such choices, and here we rejoin Levinas, is not a liberty granted Dasein, and Dasein therefore finds that its freedom is necessarily grounded (or ungrounded) in its dereliction (BT §53 [74]). Choice is radically contingent. One is submitted to a world. Dasein, we will recall, is *delivered over* to its ‘*Being free for the freedom of choosing itself*’ and ‘taking hold of itself’ qua *Da-sein* (BT §40 [188]). Moreover, Dasein is individuated as Being-in-the-world through anxiety, anxiety disclosing Dasein in its ‘uncanniness’ as one who is ‘not-at-home’ (one might say that Dasein is ‘animated’ by anxiety). Approached from an ‘existential-ontological point of view,’ Heidegger avers, ‘the ‘not-at-home’

must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon,' more primordial than the state of being-at-home with oneself' (BT §40 [189]).

Dasein, like *me voici* it would appear, is an exilic being, one whose de-centrement or displacement is constitutive of its very being. But does such congruity, although at best arguably superficial, enable us to deepen our understanding of susception and fix it in its determination more precisely? Regretably not, Levinas would maintain. For ultimately Heidegger will conceive 'selfhood' as 'free responsibility,' freedom thus (*Freiheit*) obligating Dasein 'in the ground of its essence' to be 'responsible (*verbindlich*) to itself' as thrown being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1992, 192). Furthermore, 'freedom 'is' and understands itself as the *origin* of responsibility,' in so far, Heidegger insists, as freedom 'constitutes the essence of Dasein' (Heidegger, 1992, 214-215). Despite qualifying his remarks by admitting that Dasein remains 'metaphysically powerless' in the face of the 'actuality' of extant, worldly beings (because Dasein is pre-eminently 'transcendence,' namely possibility), Heidegger's confidence in the grounding of existence in freedom galls Levinas. Nonetheless, *me voici* is delivered over to itself to the extent that qua 'support' it is backed up and 'accused in its skin' by the other person (OBBE 106). Dasein's being delivered over (*überantwortet*) to itself, however, entails its being delivered over to its ownmost possibility for death, a luxury not afforded *me voici* for whom death signifies by way of the death of others.

Although both beings (Dasein and *me voici*) are unashamedly eccentric and incontestably exposed, it is the death of another for whom, according to Levinas, I am uniquely responsible and not my ownmost being. As Levinas notes, 'in this being that we are, do 'things' not come to pass in which our being does not count as first?' (RQ 58). And again, in responsibility is accomplished 'the future of death in the present of love' (EN 217). In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas states that 'contrary to the ontology of death this self opens an order in which death can be not recognized [*peut ne pas être reconnue*]' (OBBE 115; AE 182). Levinas subordinates the Dasein in 'me' to the 'soul' (*âme*) in me (the soul of my soul being precisely the other-in-me (OBBE 191n. 3)), a bold move, to be sure, given Heidegger's repudiation of the concept of 'soul' (*Seele*), together with other outmoded explicata, for being altogether inadequate to the task of interpreting the human subject *ontologically* (BT §§6,10). As we will discover proximately, Levinas rescues this palaeologism from the margins of deconstruction (and Heideggerian *Destruktion*), altering its

'traditional' determination considerably, and crediting the concept with a distinctly proto-ethical importation (*OBBE* 103).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, as Levinas observes, death for Heidegger, as that which individualizes Dasein, is 'untransferable [*inaccessible*]' (*BT DOT* 44). One's death is one's own, after all. But it is precisely this sense of 'untransferability' (in consonance with the 'mineness' (*Jemeinigkeit*) it promotes) to which Levinas objects. Although he will concede that 'it is as *my own* that substitution for the neighbour is produced' (*OBBE* 126), and likewise, that the ultimate meaning of my 'mineness' is revealed in the wrenching of the ego from its hypostasis (*PA* 177). For although, *qua me voici*, no one can take my place as 'bearer of the world,' in becoming responsible for the other person, I am substituted for them. The relationship with the other obsesses 'me,' assigning me to myself, in as much as the oneself to which I am assigned is 'irreplaceable in responsibility [*irremplaçable dans la responsabilité*]' (*OBBE* 103; *AE* 163). The subject is hypostasized *as the other in the same* (*OBBE* 111), that is to say, as an inversion and subversion of essence, where the identity of the I is no longer reducible to the for-itself (*pour soi*) of consciousness (as a persistent presence to self) but is rather bound to the anarchic 'plot' of responsibility, having been torn from, and divested of, the 'site' of itself.

Now, Heidegger does indicate, for example in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, that in 'choosing itself Dasein really chooses precisely its being-with others and precisely its being among beings of a different character' (Heidegger, 1995, 190). Being-with (*Mitsein*), lest we forget, is constitutive of Dasein's Being. The term Dasein is intended, after all, to overcome egological determinations of being. Being-with is to be 'understood existentially' (*BT* §26 [118]) and as such situates Heidegger's *Daseinsanalytik* beyond the schema of intersubjective relations. Dasein is not an ego and thus does not confront an alter-ego. To suppose, as Heidegger puts it, that 'one human being would first have to empathize their way into the other in order to reach them' fails to grasp Dasein in its essential constitution as exposedness. Moreover, philosophy (and Heidegger's critique of Husserl is hardly covert here) has 'reinforced this illusion even further by propounding the dogma that the individual

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<sup>1</sup> Levinas is well aware of this *Destruction* of sense, as is attested by the following series of remarks. 'The notion of the soul,' Levinas states, 'has been purified over the course of the history of philosophy of any connotation other than that which evokes consciousness or thematizing contemplation' (*TDIT* 100-101).

human being exists for him or herself as an individual and that it is the individual ego with its ego-sphere which is initially and primarily given to itself as what is most certain.' Consequently, for Heidegger it is insofar as human beings exist that they find themselves always already 'transposed in their existence into other human beings,' even if there are no other human beings factually present (Heidegger, 1995, 206).

### § 15. *The charge of sense*

The apodicticity Husserl secures from the evidence (*Evidenz*) of my holding sway bodily in my primordial sphere founds the constitution of the alter-ego. Despite sharing Heidegger's reservations concerning the Husserlian enterprise of analogization, and remaining loyal to Heidegger's basic insight that Da-sein is openness – subjectivity, Levinas will argue, is 'incapable of shutting itself up' (*NI* 151) – Levinas distances himself repeatedly from Heideggerian *Mitsein* (as he does from the Buberian 'we') because he believes, quite mistakenly I would contend, that this third term smudges the distinction between the 'Same' and the 'Other' upon which 'morality' is founded. Levinas' departure from Heidegger here is therefore largely a question of disagreement regarding the status of origination. The positional point of origin, for Husserl, is the pure Ego. Heidegger ultimately places this origin outside the opposition between an ego and an alter-ego in an impersonal 'Open' (*das Offene*) or clearing (*die Lichtung*). The impersonal nature of this lighted region disturbs Levinas. He reads in Heidegger's (non-humanocentric) description of unconcealedness (ἀληθεια) a refusal on the latter's part to accord adequate significance to the relationship between human beings.

Yet crucially, I believe that Levinas arguably, and quite understandably, for psycho-biographical reasons, conflates Heidegger's 'philosophy' with the latter's involvement in the politics of National Socialism during the 1930's, and thus refuses to engage the subtle nuances of the Heideggerian œuvre post *Sein und Zeit*. Levinas' persistent excoriation of Heidegger is problematic. Having left the 'climate' of Heidegger's thought so early in his philosophical career (*EE* 19), Levinas resigns himself to calumny, rather than to the serious exegesis of Heidegger's work. For not only does Levinas fail to appreciate Heidegger's constant proviso that his presentation of the Being of Dasein moves beyond egology (thus Dasein's 'choosing



itself' cannot be interpreted ontically as an act of selfishness, nor, indeed, ought Dasein's 'being for-the-sake-of-itself' to be conflated with an *egoistic* struggle for existence, both of which Levinas attributes to Dasein, and both of which Heidegger repudiates), but he also reproaches Heidegger for what he deems to be the complicity between the latter's ontological (and subsequently metontological) analyses, and the ontico-empirical commitments *to which* they give rise and *from which* they are derived.

However, Levinas himself, as intimated in chapters one and two, sullies the boundaries between the proto-ethical and ethical regions of description in his own writings, and regularly deduces 'ethical' consequences from proto-ethical principles or ἀρχαί, awarding ethical importation to proto-ethical structuration. This often imperceptible slippage or *glissement de sens*, which proves detrimental to the overall cogency of Levinas' project, but which may be accounted for because of the constraint imposed upon Levinas' thought by the concrete (pre-philosophical) situation of human suffering, is not so readily discerned in Heidegger's thought which is compromised instead (particularly in its later phases) by its dalliance with the crypto-mythological. Therefore when Levinas argues that 'persecution is not something added to the subjectivity of the subject,' but is rather the 'ultimate secret of incarnation [*l'ultime secret de l'incarnation*]' (OBBE 111; AE 175), he thus intends the designation in question to describe both the 'trauma' of the subject in her vulnerability and the impossibility of evading another's assignation (proto-ethics), and the empirical situation of being responsible for another person, that is, in suffering for them (ethics). The empirical accomplishes the proto-ethical and yet the terms of the ethical recur (like subjectivity itself) on the hither side of their own instantiation in the concrete. Quite a feat it would seem! Indeed this 'secret' of incarnation is so clandestine, and the modal conversion upon which it depends so furtively accomplished, that the operation(s) by which it is installed conceal their traces absolutely (awarding new meaning to the phrase, *Deus ex absconditus*, perhaps).

'Substitution' may well be central to Levinas' mature account of subjectivity, however its production/application is rent by a scission which undermines its presentation. Furthermore, if the ontology of being-with is an ontology of embodiment (to be sure an implicit if underdeveloped theme in Heidegger) then one may, with Jean-Luc Nancy, be justified in identifying the origin (ἀρχή) Husserl

situates at the heart of positional consciousness, as the 'discrete spacing *between us*;' a spacing, what is more, extending 'between all beings' and not simply between those of the species *homo sapiens* (Nancy, 2000, 19), thus correcting the anthropocentrism of Levinasian first philosophy.

As factual Being-in-the-world, Dasein is thrown into a body and subjected to 'moods' (albeit not 'psychological' (BT §29 [134])) which arise on a definite bodily basis. 'Embodiment,' Heidegger will announce in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 'presents an organizing factor' and is that in which Dasein is 'dispersed' and 'disunited in a particular sexuality.' Dasein's essence 'contains a primordial bestrewal,' Heidegger adds, 'a dissemination' in the flesh. Such 'bestrewal' (*Streuung*) and 'dissemination' (*Zerstreuung*) (Heidegger, 1984, 137-8) are primordial features of Dasein and *bind it* forcibly to its 'there' (*Da*), subjecting it to the existence it must take up and, quite literally, body forth. Being-with is bodily through and through, therefore, and Dasein is individuated or 'dispersed' bodily in-the-world. One emerges outside, into the 'Open' (*das Offene*), through one's body. The body is that by which Dasein pervades its environment and that upon which the disclosive operations of disposition are founded.

Certainly Dasein, for whom its Being is, we will remember, an issue for it, *is charged with making sense of Being*, I would contend. Dasein is obliged to make sense of its existential predicament, such making sense being precisely, as Heidegger intimates in the 'Letter on "Humanism,"' a matter of comportment (or thinking as conduct) (Heidegger, 1947, 220). This requirement to make sense of its existential situation, impels Dasein in its engagement with Being, and is not imposed or enforced upon it from without, but motivates Dasein in its very essence, since Being ultimately *ek-sists* Dasein. Being set-forth bodily into the 'Open' (or 'clearing') that Being is, entails that Dasein lets beings be (Heidegger, 1947, 220); by which Heidegger no doubt means that Dasein lets Being accomplish (or achieve) itself according to its own determination, in and through the beings that are. Bodily 'dispersal,' while obviously not 'ethical' in the customary sense awarded this term, does permit Heidegger to think the 'there' of Da-sein as the originary 'abode' of

ethics (Heidegger, 1947, 256), the place (τόπος) where sense is enacted or practised, and the place from which axiological significations derive their meaning.<sup>2</sup>

To Levinas, of course, this Heideggerian ethos (ἦθος) completely elides the dimension of the interhuman (despite highlighting the importance of the body) and suppresses the dignity of the other 'human' being, favouring instead the dignity (*Würde*) of Being in its self-disclosure. Moreover, Dasein's 'conduct' is moderated (one might say it is affected) by Being, such that *Being affects itself through Dasein*. Auto-affection is affection of  $\chi$  by Being affecting itself.

For Levinas, as we have seen, responsibility is hetero-affectively inspired, and while it could be maintained that metontologically speaking Dasein is the self-affection of Being, ontologically such motivation, like the 'call of conscience' itself, nonetheless appears to come '*from me and yet from beyond me*' (BT §57 [275]). The status of this 'beyond' in Heidegger's thought is undeniably complex and despite the fact that it is arguably through the miasma of 'Uncanniness' (*Unheimlichkeit*), itself the most basic kind of Being-in-the-world, that Dasein is summoned to its potentiality-for-Being, Levinas will persist in disclaiming the '*Da*' of Dasein to be a reposeful 'attachment to Place' (*attachement au Lieu*) characterized by its 'enrootedness' (*enracinement*) (HGU 232; HGN 325). While Heidegger will concede in *Being and Time* that Dasein does 'repose in the weight of its existing' (BT §57 [284]), in the *Basic Questions of Philosophy* he will argue that the *Grundbestimmung* of 'wonder,' or *Er-staunen* as he terms it, '*displaces* man into and before beings as such,' this displacement thereby delivering Dasein to its 'basic disposition' (Heidegger, 1994, 147). Granted that this very displacement compels Dasein to make 'sense' of beings, and to 'suffer' and 'accept' Being as that which 'overgrows' and 'transforms' it, this 'suffering,' moreover, being 'beyond activity and passivity as commonly understood' (Heidegger, 1994, 151), do Levinas' pronouncements not trivialize Heidegger's thinking unfairly?

Indeed, even Levinas himself appears to acknowledge the possibility that despite Heidegger's prioritization of the thinking of Being, the displacement effectuated in 'anxiety,' by which Dasein is exposed to the 'bare 'that-it-is' of its

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<sup>2</sup> This is a proposal already prefigured in *Being and Time*. There Heidegger argues that 'Dasein itself, as in each case my Dasein and this Dasein, *must* be; and in the same way the truth, as Dasein's disclosedness, *must* be. This belongs to Dasein's essential thrownness into the world' (BT §44 [228]).

‘there’ (BT §57 [227]), permits one to catch sight of ‘the *original* significance of ethics’ (EN 168). Furthermore, when reduced, Levinas confers, consciousness reveals itself to be possessed ‘by the non-ego, by the other [and] by “facticity”’ (IS 150), an admission that could be hardly more Heideggerian. It may be then, that the ‘anxiety’ which individuates and isolates Dasein, exposing it to the trauma of its being *not-at-home* as a mere place-holder (*Platzhalter*) of the ‘nothing,’ exposes it, and opens it in a new way, to the incursions of others. Phenomenologically, in the wake of the uncanny (*das Unheimlich*), in whose wake, unbeknownst to *das Man*, Dasein always already finds itself ‘dispersed,’ Being-with (*Mitsein*) may be an altogether more traumatic affair than one might first have thought; particularly if, like *me voici*, who recurs on the hither side of itself, Dasein can ‘never come back behind its thrownness’ (BT §58 [284]), nor elude the originary trauma of its exposedness (and is Dasein in its resoluteness not, as Heidegger informs us, ‘pushed’ into ‘solicitous Being with Others’ (BT §60 [298])?). To be sure, the ‘emphasis of sense’ (OBBE 50) Levinas identifies as the modality of dis-interestedness, obligates one to be for-the-other corporeally, since signification has meaning ‘*only* among beings of flesh and blood’ (OBBE 74). Notwithstanding Dasein’s bodily ‘bestrewal’ – Dasein’s being *Streuung* out corporeally – the fact that Dasein *goads* itself, qua conscience, from dispersion in the ‘they,’ the fact, therefore, that Being *goads* itself *through* Dasein (Heidegger, 1947, 235), convinces Levinas that the logic of the *Daseinsanalytik* (and the subsequent *Holzwege* along which Heidegger’s thinking digressed) entrenches Heidegger’s thought of *Mitdasein* within the confines of a *circulus vitiosus*, from which Levinas will feel it necessary to depart. Yes, one is under a directive to make sense of Being, but such ‘sense,’ Levinas will charge, is first glimpsed in the face of the Other, even if *spection*, *per se*, is not the *via regia* by which one approaches the face.

Sense signifies, one might say, through the patience and pain of contact. Susception is separation-in-proximity, and it is the body through which the subject is susceptible. Again, with Heidegger, and against Husserl (although Levinas will retain and develop Husserl’s emphasis on the lived body (*Leib*) as central to the ‘relationship’ with the Other), Levinas rejects the role of empathy (*Einfühlung*) in the encounter with the Other insisting that, ‘substitution is not the psychological event of compassion or intropathy in general, but makes possible the paradoxical psychological possibilities of putting oneself in the place of another’ (OBBE 146).

Now, if substitution conditions the possibility of empathy, are we to presume likewise that qua proto-ethical *déstructure*, substitution establishes the formal conditions for empirical ethical encounters?

Arguably, while Levinas will maintain that 'substitution' 'precedes the empirical order' (*OBBE* 116) and expresses the absolute passivity of the self, it is only accomplished *in concreto* in and through my relationship to the other human being. It is because something like 'sacrifice' occurs that Levinas is able to *deduce* responsibility as its ultimate term. By reducing such concrete instances of charity to the substrata that belie them Levinas reveals, and subsequently describes, the transcendental conditions of such actions. But these conditions do not give rise to their instantiation in the concrete, they rather take shape there, and the figure or figures they assume is that of a 'face that is weighed down with a skin' and a skin, (my skin behind which I am ill at ease, so much like a 'Nessus tunic' is it (*OBBE* 109)) 'which is always a modification of [and by] a face' (*OBBE* 85; translation attested). Of course, the deduction Levinas pursues here is something of a JewXGreek contrivance (if not connivance) and the slippage previously accented, between the proto-ethical and the ethical orders of description, remains no less oleaginous. Levinas may well retort that his deductions are 'necessary and yet non-analytical' (*TI* 28) for they attempt to retrace the 'trace' of that which withdraws from thematization in the present. The 'moment' of 'ethical' impact, he will argue, is (dis)structured diachronically and therefore resists the strictures of an exacting chronometry. Perhaps we will be prepared to waive our criticism of Levinas on this count, therefore? Before we recant our earlier remarks in undue haste, however, let us examine the accord between 'enjoyment' (*jouissance*) and 'substitution' (*substitution*) in order to elucidate the stages through which the deduction Levinas oversees must pass en route to its accomplishment as ethical deliverance.

## § 16. *Modification*

We will recall that *jouissance* (functioning in many ways as a Levinasian existentielle) conveys a far wider denotation of meaning than its common usage in either English or French would suggest. *Jouissance* is not restricted in signification to necessarily positive, or broadly speaking hedonic, states-of-mind, but encapsulates, under the auspices of Levinas' deployment of the term, what might



otherwise be regarded as negative determinations of meaning, as well as the kind of contemplative activity commended, as we have seen, by Aristotle. Enjoyment is *en-joinment*. I cleave to myself, and assume my position in Being on the ‘basis’ of my body which is ‘nourished’ by the elemental, in which, qua existent, I am bathed. Of course alimentation need not be a genial affair (although arguably the earth ‘Ark’ that subtends the ‘base’ of my body is genial in a familial-cum-generative sense, being the ‘source’ of all generation, where generation must not be limited to production but includes manifestation, as we will discover in our concluding chapter, and where we would be rash to dismiss the insight that perhaps *Deus sive natura*) and the ‘sinking of one’s teeth into things’ (TI 129), which ultimately serves as Levinas’ trope for enjoyment (OBBE 125), similarly entails that things sink their ‘teeth’ into me, so much so that the joy of en-joinment is also a paining one must endure. As Bachelard notes in *The Poetics of Reverie*, a suggestion with which Levinas would agree, ‘what a grasp of the world is a bite’ (Bachelard, 1971, 178). The upsurge of the subject thus *begins* in enjoyment (TI 119) and enjoyment is won through the achievement of *separation*.

In later works, of which *Otherwise than Being* is, of course, exemplary, enjoyment features decisively as an ‘ineluctable moment of sensibility’ (OBBE 72), the very pulsation of the I. Enjoyment enjoys ‘its own appetite’ (OBBE 73), Levinas opines and thus thrives upon the conative drive that both motivates and sustains it. Again, the pre-philosophical experience of ‘biting’ is instructive for Levinas in this regard. He writes:

To bite on the bread is the very meaning of tasting. The taste is the way a sensible *subject becomes a volume*, or the irreducible event in which *the spatial phenomenon of biting becomes* the identification called me, in which it becomes me through the life that lives from its very life in a *fuere vivendi* (OBBE 73; emphasis added).

The invocation of space here is critical. As we have seen, Dasein’s spatiality (*Räumlichkeit*), at least during the period of *Being and Time*, is a product of its de-severances and the way it ‘makes room’ for entities within an equipmental region. Space is pre-eminently pragmatic, therefore – organized in accordance with the πράγματα with which Dasein deals: ‘Dasein can be spatial only as care,’ we recall

(BT §70 [367]). The Levinasian existent, by contrast, accomplishes its separation concretely in the immediacy of sensibility. The bite is a 'spatial phenomenon [*phénomène spatial*]' (OBBE 73: AE 118) because it discloses the world immanently as 'savor' (*saveur*).

Like Dasein, who takes space in (*einnehmt*) (BT §70 [368]), making space its own and thereby providing for its existential leeway or *Spielraum*, the existent assimilates that which nourishes it and *coils in upon itself*. This 'coiling in over itself [*s'enroulant sur lui-même*]' (OBBE 73; AE 118) is crucial for it quite literally *fleshes the ego out*, granting it a savourous space (very much akin to the 'leeway' of Dasein) within which to 'enjoy' itself. This inwardness, and the coiling of the ego back upon itself, which Levinas likens to the 'winding of a skein' (OBBE 73), is hollowed out in and by enjoyment, a felicitous space which is subsequently cored out by the Other (although according to the diachronic logic of 'creation' such subsequence is always already underwritten by the an-archic 'event' that precedes it) and everted so that the ego, in its immanence, is confounded and exposed to the 'outside' from whence its identity is constituted and to which it is oriented.

The 'dominant signification [*signification dominante*]' (OBBE 63; AE 104) of the sensible to which Levinas is led back from the phenomenon of 'biting' (broadly representative of enjoyment) is to be found in vulnerability, therefore. Enjoyment feeds upon itself and is never sated. At the heart of sensibility dissatisfaction stirs; the subject is unsettled in its immanence and its coincidence with itself is disturbed. Sensible experience is pervaded by restlessness and it is this restlessness (*inquiétude*) that ultimately marks the 'passing,' qua trace, of the Other and is indicative of the subject being, as it were, caught up (*prise en*) in proximity. The relationship with the other person ante cedes consciousness in its enjoyment, although the restlessness that troubles such enjoyment of oneself provides the phenomenological *Leitfaden*, or clue, to the subject's pre-originary susceptibility. In the midst of sensation then, *the ego is torn from itself* and its enjoyment is frustrated.

*In the midst of sensation?* If sensibility is characterized principally by a 'taking care of the other's need,' that is, as 'giving' (OBBE 74), then does one find oneself 'in proximity' only insofar as one is approached by an other? To interpret Levinas thus would be to miss the point, I fear. The openness of sensibility (an openness not to be confused with the intentionality of consciousness aiming at objects) attests *immediately* to my being exposed to the other. Perceptual acts already

harbour (the) ethical (signification) since in any act of perception, or αἰσθησις, *I am seized by* an other (an object or 'thing') 'from whom I suffer' (NI 146). I am affected, and my being affected reveals my passivity. Where objects *encroach* upon me, the Other person *persecutes* me, and as we have hitherto seen, the Other need not be present 'bodily' before me (of course, the other is (n)ever truly 'present' before me) for me to be obsessed by her, for the 'mineral surfaces of things' (OBBE 191 n.10) already obsess, and they do so, Levinas insists, because they bear the traces of human others across their surfaces.

When *reduced*, therefore, the sensibility determinate of gustatory, olfactory or tactile sensation reveals as its basis the one-for-the-other of signification. The body qua base may, as the analyses of *Totality and Infinity* make clear, be based in the elemental other (*l'autre*), but the format of the element is itself revealed, in later works, to be the material substrate *through which* 'signification signifies [*signification signifie*]' (OBBE 68; AE 111). Matter 'materializes' in the satisfaction of enjoyment (OBBE 73), but it is accomplished *ethically* in and through donative acts. As Levinas concludes, matter is '*altered by the immediacy of contact*' (OBBE 74), modified, or dare one say it (and no doubt Levinas intends a designation of this sort), matter is 'redeemed' through being given. Signification thus entails:

the passivity of being-for-another, which is possible only in the form of giving the very bread I eat. But for this one has to first enjoy one's bread, not in order to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one's heart, to give one's self in giving it. Enjoyment, is an ineluctable moment of sensibility (OBBE 72).

Of course, the 'bread' I eat, masticate and swallow bites back as remorse, gnawing away at the stony core of my identity like indigestion and reminding me, through the galling pain of heartburn, of the famished and the destitute who I deprive with every mouthful I ingest (OBBE 114). In the concrete situation of charity, therefore, 'I' recur qua 'me' on the hither side of my 'enjoyment' of my self. I am, as Levinas states, held hostage by the other person who 'animates' me, 'loosening up' and 'unclamping' my identity (OBBE 68). It is in this sense, then, that one is to understand what Levinas means by substitution, namely the 'reversal' whereby the

'other *inspires* the same' (OBBE 64). Substitution is the panification and distribution of the self, one might conclude (were one perhaps theologically inclined).

Clearly, the modification of the ego in its substantiality that is characteristic of substitution, differs markedly from the 'intentional modification (*intentionale Modifikation*) of my Ego by which, according to Husserl, the other becomes constituted appresentatively (*appräsentativ*) for me in my primordial sphere (CM §52 [144]). For while both Levinas and Husserl agree that the 'animate organism' (*Leib*) plays a pivotal role in the constitution of, and/or the relationship to, the 'other,' Husserl, or so Levinas will advert, remains entrenched in the belief that the reduction effects a passage 'from a less perfect to a more perfect knowledge' (PA 178). Thus, the intersubjective reduction Husserl implements, despite to some extent liberating the alter ego from the compass of the ego's sphere of ownness, terminates in an equivalence or reciprocity between dyads (albeit, as Derrida confers, that of a transcendental symmetry between two empirical asymmetries (Derrida, 1978,126)). The cardinal points of space (or more pointedly, kinaesthetic space) – the hic and the illic – are interchangeable to the degree that the sense I derive of the other's body in the 'mode there' (*Modus Dort*) results from an apperceptive transfer from my body in the 'mode here [*Modus Hier*]' (CM §54 [147]). The 'motivational basis' (*Motivations fundament*) for the analogising apprehension of the other, then, is my animate organism. I am located here, 'somatically' (*leiblich*), and as such occupy the 'center of a primordial "world" oriented around me [*Zentrum einer um mich orientierten primordialen Welt*]' (CM §54 [148]). This primordial sphere of ownness, appurtenant to the ego in its position of prominence, has 'the content of the Here' (*Gehalt des Hier*) and thus corresponds, within Levinasian thought, to the sphere of the 'Same': the ego in its immanence and enjoyment. To be sure, Husserl is not claiming that the other person is 'given' to the ego 'originally' (*ursprünglicher*). The other is not merely 'a moment of my essence' (*Moment meines Eigenwesens*). Nor is the other's body simply a 'product' of my 'sensuousness.' Rather a certain 'mediacy of intentionality' (*Mittelbarkeit der Intentionalität*) governs the operations of appresentation (*Appräsentation*) and association (*Assoziation*) because the sense (*Sinn*) I appropriate of the other qua animate organism, cannot become 'actualized' originarily in my 'primordial sphere of ownness [*primordialen Sphäre*]' (CM §§50-51 [139 –143]). The explosion toward the outside (the alter-ego) from the heart of

one's sphere of ownness (the inherence of the other qua other in my primordial sphere) is treated by Husserl under the heading of empathy (*Einfühlung*).

The other, for Husserl, is appresented (*appräsentiert*) by way of her body, which is that which is presented (*präsentiert*) in my *Eigensphäre*. There is a concordance (*Paarung*), or complicity, between my body 'here' (*hic*), and the body of the other, 'there' (*illic*), a concordance that while unquestionably instructive, misses, or so Levinas will opine, the matrix of susception that belies it.

Levinas discerns great merit in Husserl's account of intersubjectivity (to which we have paid only cursory attention here), however he will castigate Husserl for being overly preoccupied with the lucidity of self-evidence and, moreover, for failing to execute the reduction far enough (Husserl misses its 'deeper modalities [*modalités plus profondes*],' Levinas surmises (CW 161; CV 56)). Husserl, Levinas will suggest, overlooks the defection of identity that is definitive of susception. The exposure to the other cannot be interpreted as a state, since the very foundations of egoity are de-structured in the encounter with the other person. Yes, the animate organism or *Leib* is the mode of access to another; but the 'I' which, according to Husserl, holds sway (*walten*) constitutionally in the lived body, is 'unseated by the Other [*désarçonnée par Autrui*]' in the analysis Levinas assays (CW 168; CV 60). One must speak, therefore, of inspiration rather than appresentation. The seizure of the subject pertinent to susceptibility is 'prior to every position of the subject' (PA 179) and thereby substructs the sway of the Ego in its primordial sphere. As Levinas comments in 'From Consciousness to Wakefulness' (1974):

The spatial interchangeability of the *here* and the *there* do not only constitute the homogeneity of space. Through the interchangeability of the here and the there, the Ego, despite its being so obviously *primordial* and hegemonous in its *hic et nunc* and in its identification, becomes *secondary*, sees itself as other, exposes itself to the other, already has to give an account of itself (CW 164).

The intersubjective reduction confers the possibility of a relationship with the other person not founded upon the promise of 'knowledge' and immune to the dissimulations of egological science. Husserl's presentation of analogising apperception reveals lacunae in the ego's constitution of the world. In seeing itself as



another the ego entertains the thought (albeit kinaesthetically enlivened) of a placial relocation. The egological *hic* cedes temporarily to the alter-egological *illic* and an empathic exchange takes place. Such an exchange of place is decidedly gnoseological however, since the 'ultimate figure of the meaningful [*Ultime figure du sens*]' remains inscribed in the field of consciousness, with the pure Ego stationed at its centre (CW 165; CV 56). And this despite the 'terrestrial weight' (*poids terrestre*) of the body which presents itself as the zero point of all experience (CW 165; CV 55), and the fact that hyletic data are to be found at the base of intentional acts. Of course, this zero point (*Nullpunkt*) of subjectivity is, as Levinas concedes, 'already a conjunction of Kinaestheses and movements' (IM 126), so much so that the 'activity of holding still' (*Aktivität des Stillhaltens*), by which the ego governs its primordial sphere, is itself constituted kinaesthetically. Reposefulness is motivated kinaesthetically and thus remains an activity behind which Husserl will secrete an intentional aim. Ultimately, one might say, the *Leib* is 'a basis without mobility' (Husserl, 1981a, 226).

In contrast, ethical animation divests the ego of its autarky rendering the subject radically passive as one who is 'accused' in its ipseity. Arguably Levinas inverts and adapts Husserl's assertion that the *Leib* is the 'bearer of the Ego [*Träger des Ich*]' (Husserl, 1997, 162). We are thus informed, through recourse to the Biblical formula of Numbers 11:12, and in a reversal of the logic of alimentation that governs section two of *Totality and Infinity*, that the subject 'bears' the other person 'as the nurse bears the nursling' (OBBE 91). The pure Ego is disturbed in its recumbency and 'awoken' to the fact that it is incumbent upon it (or rather that it is incumbent upon 'me,' since the 'I' is driven from the generality of its concept) to bear the Other. I am, by my 'very position,' 'responsibility through and through' (TH 17), Levinas contends, because I am constrained to give of myself fully as, indeed, I am constrained to bear the burden of my being and the lassitude which invariably accompanies it (EE 35).

### § 17. *Holding sway ethically*

For Husserl, space is constituted as a product of the kinaesthetically functioning lived body (*Leiblichkeit*), which is positioned at the centre of the perception field that revolves around it. The lived body subtends space because it is not merely *in* space,

but rather *pervades* space and *moves through* it, such movement playing a pivotal role in the apperceptive expansion (*Erweiterung*) of the near-sphere (*Nahsphäre*) of immediate constitutional activity into the system of fixed places (*Ortssystem*) that settle and co-ordinate what Husserl will term, the core-world (*Kernwelt*) appurtenant to the incarnate Ego.

The constitution of homogeneous, geometric space (the ‘endlessly open world of space’ (Husserl, 1981b, 249)) may thus be traced back to the absolute *hic et nunc* of the *Ichzentrum*, a decidedly corporeal, positional point of origin. As Husserl intimates in a late manuscript from 1931, ‘The World of the Living Present and the Constitution of the Surrounding World external to the Organism,’ from the beginning ‘the animate organism has constitutively an exceptional position’ (Husserl, 1981b, 249). This ‘exceptional position’ (*Ausnahmestellung*), is arguably best exemplified by the animate organism taken at rest (Levinas’ analysis of ‘sleep’ and the founding significance of the body as a ‘base’ clearly build upon these Husserlian observations). The body is a pivot about which the world turns, even if the body is in motion, as it is when walking or moving between places. Indeed, and somewhat akin to the peripateticism of Aristotelian thought, for which perambulation is salutary and instructive philosophically, Husserl believes walking to be integral both to the *constitution* and *orientation* of the ‘original core-sphere’ of intentional activity (Husserl, 1981b, 249). The ‘inaction’ of what he terms ‘walking kinaesthetics’ – I remain stationary despite walking because the perspectival changes phenomena undergo as I walk to, around, and past them continue to be oriented about my animate organism – functions as the ‘firm zero of orientation’ (Husserl, 1981b, 250). The *Leib* is consequently experienced as ‘my total Organ,’ an ‘Organ’ articulated into different organs, each in turn governed by the ‘functioning ego’ that holds sway in them (Husserl, 1981b, 249), wielding them according to their distinct modalities of sense.

The ethically reduced subject of responsibility (a subject who, Levinas insists, is quite literally ‘made of responsibilities’ (*NI* 140), as the ‘substance’ of *Dasein* for Heidegger is ‘existence’ (*BT* §43 [212])) is not motivated kinaesthetically, so much as kinaes-ethically. The kinaesthetic activity by and through which space is constituted and on the basis of which the evidence (*Evidenz*) of the alter-ego is secured for cognition, is itself animated kinas-ethically: the schema (σχῆμα) of the lived body (*Leib*) is undergirded by an ethical body (*corps éthique*) which submits

the Husserlian presentation of space to deconstruction and subsequent ethical redaction. The Husserlian Ego may well remain, as Levinas adverts, 'untarnished' (*impassible*) in its commerce with the Other (*OS* 155; *HS* 211), however, the ethical subject is wounded by the others it bears, and its identity qua I is undone by them. Substitution thus 'operates in the entrails of the self, rending its inwardness,' Levinas will maintain (*OBBE* 196n.22). Space, in turn:

belongs to the sense of my responsibility for the other. The everywhere of space is the from everywhere of faces that concern me and put me into question, despite the indifference that seems to present itself to justice. Being will have a meaning as a universe, and the unity of the universe will be in me as subject to being. That means that the space of the universe will manifest itself as the dwelling of the others. It is inasmuch as it is inhabited by the others that look at me that the pre-geometrical *eidos* of space is described. I support the universe (*OBBE* 196-7n.22).

The nodal points of ethical space are not, pace Heidegger, pragmatic – they are not made apparent to me upon my misplacing a piece of equipment, or a tool (*BT* §22 [104]). Nor are they strictly speaking poietic – qua 'things' the fourfold constellation of earth, sky, mortals and divinities (*das Geviert*) does not 'stay' in them (Heidegger, 1996 [1947], 156) – nor again are such loci (*Stelle*) the termini of the motions of bodies, as Husserl will argue throughout the 'Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature' (Husserl, 1981a, 225). Rather it is the plural fold of the face that, to employ explicata familiar to us from *Being and Time*, 'regionalizes' space and 'makes room' (*einräumt*) for the dissemination and discernment of proto-ethical sense (*sens*).

One might say, in consequence, that the Levinasian subject is de-severed by the face, and therefore that that 'for-the-sake-of which' (*Worum-willen*) *me voici* is concerned, needless to say, non-instrumentally, is the other person, and other persons, in their singular-plural need. The circumstance of the 'face,' I would like to suggest, is the 'whither' (*das Wohin*) toward which the 'hither' and the 'thither' of ethical life are oriented, a proposal to which we will return in the conclusion to this work. Levinas' presentation of space is characterized, then, by its unremitting materialism (a foil, no doubt, to correct the henology of father Parmenides; the oneself lacks a 'fatherland,' after all (*OBBE* 195n.12)), since space, ethically reduced, is accomplished concretely as the *labour* of substitution, itself a dual

movement of eversion and gestation (maternity is the ‘gestation of the other in the same,’ Levinas confirms (*OBBE* 75)). It follows that for Levinas, space is configured positively both as the *product* or *production* of supererogation and kinas-ethical activity (albeit middle voiced proto-activity in the guise of portage), and the matrix *in which* the manifold of faces to which the subject is exposed is embedded, and *from which* they signify καθ’ αὐτό.

The sense of space is therefore not restricted for Levinas to the representation of an entity, nor is it merely a subjective ‘form in which something can be an object of empirical intuition for our sense’ (Kant, 1993, 160). Unlike Kant, for whom space ultimately has its seat in ‘the subjective constitution of mind’ (*CPR* A23/B38) as the *a priori* condition of possibility for spatial representation, Levinas endeavours to ‘avoid the schema of an intentional subject (*OBBE* 178) and thus defines space principally as an ‘openness of the self to the other’ (*ouverture de soi à l’autre*) in response to ‘the openness of a face’ (*l’ouverture du visage*) that confronts it (*OBBE* 180-181; *AE* 277-278). It is qua support that the subject is ‘here’ (and this of course presupposes the subject’s being susceptible) and not as the point of origination for intentional acts. It is as such that Levinas will describe the oneself as an ‘excession of the here [*excession de l’ici*’] (*OBBE* 193n. 31; *AE* 14) and as a ‘panting’ (*un haletement*) on the ‘hither side of the here [*en deçà de l’ici*’] (*OBBE* 180; *AE* 276), the *hic* exceeded being the egoic *hic*, or *Ichzentrum*, that Husserl deems to be stationary (and thus *at rest*) even during motion. *Me voici*, one might hasten to add, is, or rather goes, ‘without rest’ (*sans repos*) (*OBBE* 180; *AE* 276), since it is by virtue of its sufferance for others, and is thus an Archimedean point of a wholly different order to the *Nullpunkt* around which, according to Husserl, the concrete world of life (*Lebenswelt*) pivots and ‘achieves’ its sense (*Sinn*) for an ego.

The body *by which* the oneself is susceptible is the point of intersection between the other and myself, the situation or *situs*, according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner (1749-1821), whom Levinas cites approvingly, of a tension, or torsion, between ‘worlds,’ the place of the ‘incatenation of worlds [*l’incaténation des mondes*’] (*IGRH* 158; *IDD* 189). The human being is composed of the ‘residues’ (*résidues*) of these countless worlds (where ‘world’ may be interpreted broadly in terms of ‘spiritual collectivities, people and structures [*les collectivités, les personnes, les structures spirituelles*’] (*IGRHV* 161; *IDD* 194)) and thus bears the traces of encounters with innumerable others (although both Hayyim of Volozhin

and Levinas restrict such encounters to the sphere of the interhuman).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, commenting upon the Kabbalistic cosmology of Hayyim Volozhiner, to which he gives his assent, Levinas notes that the aforementioned ‘worlds’ are connected with the various organs of the human body, each one subject to the Torah’s commandments, in such a way that ‘the whole of the worlds constitutes a human stature.’ Moreover, and here perhaps one observes the origin of a motif so prominent in *Otherwise than Being*, the human being ‘feeds’ (*L’homme nourrit*) the ‘worlds’ through his or her body, thereby establishing a relation ‘between the human body and the Temple of Jerusalem, which for its part is an exact replica of the heavenly Temple, the order of absolute holiness’ (IGRHV 158; IDD 190). Of course, it is only through *nourishing* others that the Torah’s commandments are kept (the ‘tearing away of bread from the mouth that tastes it [*l’arrachement du pain à la bouche qui le savoure*]’ (OBBE 64; AE 105); where bread, we recall, already refers to the incarnate subject (OBBE 191n.7)).

The understanding of the body Levinas inherits from Hayyim of Volozhin, is irrepressibly Jewish and, what is more, Kabbalistic in outlook. Despite tempering the speculative excesses of Rabbi Hayyim’s cosmography, Levinas retains the moral imperative that arguably impels it, adapting it to his own metaphysical ends and incorporating it into his phenomenological analyses. The responsible subject *bears* the ‘widow’ in her *Heimwelt*, *supports* the orphan in his *Nahsphäre*, and *attends* the stranger in his *Kernwelt*, nourishing each (and therefore being ‘animated’ by each accordingly) with the ‘substance’ of its flesh. Hence, in the essay ‘Transcendence and Height,’ Levinas will note that ‘it is *as if* the substance of the ‘I’ were ‘made of saintliness’ (TH 23), since in its being it is ‘created’ for-the-other (*pour-l’autre*). Furthermore, it is *as such* that the description of proximity outlined in *Otherwise than Being* may be designated ‘as a hagiography of the-one-to-the-other [*comme hagiographie de l’un-pour l’autre*],’ Levinas asserts, because the subjectivity of the

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<sup>3</sup> Given that, ‘in spite of everything,’ Levinas claims to be doing ‘phenomenology’ (QA 87), he might have related the Kabbalism of Hayyim of Volozhin more closely to the phenomenology of Husserl. As the following passage from *Ideas* makes clear, there are resources within Husserl to counter the speculative aspects of Rabbi Hayyim’s thought. Certainly, the notion of ‘incatenation’ need not be interpreted cosmologically: ‘the eidetically singular essence [*eidetisch Singulare*] thus implies collectively the universals lying above it and which, for their part, level by level, “lie one inside the other,” the higher always lying inside the lower’ (*Id* §12 [26]). A more daring proposal, and one consonant with the developmental themes accented in this chapter, would be to see in the phenomenon of ‘incatenation’ the intrication of child, adolescent and adult worlds.



subject is ultimately accomplished as a substitution for another (*OBBE* 193n.33; *AE* 146). The universe of possible sense for Levinas is, when rerouted through the thought of Hayyim of Volozhin, the multiverse of possible susception. The limits of susceptibility are the limits, then, of the Mitnagdic imagination.

### § 18. *Haptic science*

We have hitherto problematized the move by which Levinas seeks to convert this pre-originary susceptibility into a sufferance ‘for’ the other and found his attempts to justify this ‘reversal’ (*renversement*) (*OBBE* 64; *AE* 105) inadequate to the situation under scrutiny. But perhaps we have been unnecessarily callow in our disquisition of Levinas and failed to grasp the audacity of his proposals. In the interest of fairness let us review the status of this conversion in the light of our ongoing explication of ethical space.

It is indeed true that Levinas likens the oneself to a ‘fulcrum [*point d’appui*]’ (*OBBE* 106; *AE* 168), a denotation in consonance with the Husserlian presentation of the incarnate Ego as the ‘pivot’ around which the phenomenological field rotates. However, qua fulcrum the oneself (*le soi-même*) is the ‘locus of support’ for the Ego to which Husserl returns again and again in his various *Meditationen*. Ipseity is consequently not an ‘abstract point’ (*un point abstrait*), nor ‘the center of a rotation’ (*centre d’une rotation*). It is not ‘identifiable on the basis of the trajectory traced by the movement of consciousness,’ but rather ‘a point already identified from the outside,’ a point ‘already older than the time of consciousness [*déjà plus vieux que le temps de la conscience*]’ (*OBBE* 107; *AE* 169; translation modified). I would contend that in order to understand the import of Levinas’ suggestion here, one must refrain from fixing this ‘fulcrum’ in its signification too narrowly, and hence limiting the purchase of its phenomenological application, by identifying it exclusively with the recurrence of ipseity and the ‘turning of being back on itself’ (*OBBE* 106). For the ‘transference from the ‘by the other’ into the ‘for the other’ (*OBBE* 118) determinate of substitution – the reversal by which sensibility *becomes* sense (*OBBE* 64) – is accomplished across the interstices that dispart pre-philosophical life from its philosophical articulation.

Levinas’ reduction of the ‘saying’ (the very ‘liveliness of life’ (*le vivre de la vie*) which ruptures the terms in which it would be set forth (*CW* 166; *CV* 56)) to the

'said' of apophatic discourse, inevitably betrays the 'experience' it endeavours to reduce, which, as a Levinas reminds us is 'the beyond of experience' itself (*L'au-delà de l'expérience*) (OBBE 148; AE 232). Nevertheless, it is insofar as the sheer 'gratuity' of sacrificial acts happen (from the simple deference before another, exemplified in the '*après-vous*' of common courtesy, to the supreme gesture of supererogation epitomized by the giving of one's life for another) that Levinas feels compelled to account for their incidence phenomenologically and to de-duce, or *lead* analysis *back*, to the ethical circumstances that belie them. The oneself is the point of leverage between the subject (*me voici, ecce hic, hineni*) extraditing its self before the neighbour in concrete situations, albeit situations reduced under the auspices of a radical empiricism, and the Ego of philosophical research, dissected painstakingly by the likes of Husserl and Satre.

To be sure, one cannot deduce the 'for' of substitution phenomenologically without recourse to the concrete situation of its accomplishment, and it is this passage to and from the concrete that ultimately legitimates the proto-ethical proposals Levinas ventures. Levinas does not 'reduce an entity that would be the ego to the act of substituting itself that would be the being of this entity,' for 'substitution is not an act' (OBBE 117). Consequently, the oneself is 'older than the time of consciousness,' not only because the event *by which* it is constituted~~x~~created exceeds its capacities qua 'I,' but because the hour of its birth (proximity is 'the latent birth of the subject [*la naissance latente du sujet*]' (OBBE 139; AE 218)) disturbs the organization of philosophical thought, and the possibility of thematization, by exposing the labour of cognition to the work of substitution to which it defers; a predicament lying out with the bounds of the λόγος (and thus rupturing the 'container' of the 'work' (CW 166)), yet orienting the work toward its proper term. The 'work' thus replicates (or rather reproduces) the gestatorial feat of *bearing the other within the same*, according to which the subject, apropos of Levinas, is most accurately described. The 'overemphasis of openness' (*l'emphase de l'ouverture*) that characterizes responsibility, an overemphasis which epitomizes 'the thesis of the present work' (*la these du présent ouvrage*), the work in question being both the treatise entitled '*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*' and the work of substitution the latter endeavours to express, reflects the openness of the work (*oeuvre*) to what lies beyond its ken, namely the *kenosis* of one-for-the-other that 'guides discourse beyond being [*elle guide le discours au delà d'être*]' (OBBE 136;

AE 213). Again, we repeat our earlier assertion. The work of proto-ethics is at once the thesisχarsis of the situation to which it gives witness, the positing and deposition of the subject it treats, an evacuation of sense (an 'overflowing of sense by nonsense' (OBBE 164)) that signifies both the subject in its passivity and the work that would aspire to describe it. The concrete encounter with the Other denucleates its textual expression, hollowing it out and investing it with the *sens* it would claim for itself were such claims not already dashed by the figure of passivity through which they are conveyed.

Notwithstanding such remarks, the fact that Levinas will concede that 'my being faced with everything that is,' is to be accounted for because 'I am by regard for all that is' (*je suis par égard pour tout ce qui est*) (OBBE 118; AE 188), and yet maintain that 'I' am faced only by the human, continues to undermine the cogency of his conclusions and indicates, once again, that the inner horizon of the work of ethics is far less accommodating than it might well be were the νόμοι that regulate its production more compliant to the 'liveliness of life' in its myriad forms. If, as Merleau-Ponty affirms in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, 'an excitation is not perceived when it strikes a sensory organ which is not 'attuned' to it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 75), and thus that the significance of sensuous data is a function or by-product of anticipation, then does Levinas' refusal to accord the nonhuman a place in (his) 'ethics' not betoken the fact that susceptibility is always already attuned to the 'faces' that 'traumatize' it, and attuned, what is more, in decidedly nuanced ways?

To clarify. Our principal objective here is not to advance a 'green' philosophy, nor to ecologize Levinas (a move he would no doubt resist), although both aims have their relative merits. At best our findings might serve as something of a propaedeutic to an ecologically sensitive phenomenology, a phenomenology cognizant of its telluric roots (a directive pursued by such luminaries as Michel Haar, John Sallis and John Llewelyn). Rather, Levinas' reluctance to accede to the inclusion of the nonhuman creature within the fold of proto-ethics permits one to call into question his claim that susception does not revert into an assumption (OBBE 113), since the accusation that weighs upon the subject is limited to and by the figure or σχῆμα of the human face. Indeed, Levinas himself wonders whether the passivity of the self does 'not presuppose an activity behind the absolutely anarchical passivity of obsession' and conceal a 'dissimulated freedom' (OBBE 113). Qua conatus, 'I' may deprive the other person, figuratively or literally (and Levinas' use of the trope,

and reliance upon hyperbole, purposefully confuse the literal and the figurative within his work) of their 'place in the sun' (*place au soleil*). However, does Levinas not systematically<sup>4</sup> expel the nonhuman from the 'lighted region' or 'field' of ethics (a region in many ways comparable to the 'clearing' (*die Lichtung*) assayed by Heidegger, with the notable exception, perhaps, that the 'field' Levinas deduces is unashamedly corporeal) their 'faces' failing to materialize in the light cast by the 'good beyond Being' (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) which illuminates the 'field' (*champs éthique*) Levinas details?

If categorial activity presupposes susceptibility, and susceptibility entails the encounter between bodies, viz., contact, does susceptibility itself not presuppose recognition? Either, one must conclude that the subject, in its susceptibility, is stricken with a severe case of prosopagnosia, that is, an inability to recognise certain faces (for example, those of the nonhuman), or, one must presume that susceptibility is always already organized according to the directives of a certain cultural programming. Unless one is willing to pronounce the flesh immediately and immanently casuistic, thereby granting it the 'ability' to discriminate between, in this instance, the ethical weight of what does and does not 'face' it (as a support the subject thus calibrates the freight it bears), one must, I would contend, concede that susception and assumption are equiprimordial (although the time in which they are conjoint is structured diachronically).

To be sure, the ethical soma (σῶμα) is incontestably exteroceptive, receiving impressions from 'outside' itself. But is it not also epicritical and therefore discriminating in its discernment, discriminating, that is, of those images, faces, or, let us say, figures, that *follow upon* and *proceed* the initial and traumatic wounding it endures? If sensibility is truly alvine (a veritable groaning of the entrails (*OBBE* 75)) as Levinas argues, then must one not submit to the notion that the subject has a 'gut feeling' (*sent instinctivement*) for the face of the human other? Is facial recognition pre-cognitive and, as it were, stomachic? After all, Merleau-Ponty will maintain that 'the passing of sensory givens before our eyes or under our hands is a *language which teaches itself* and in which the meaning is secreted by the very structure of the

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<sup>4</sup> As Levinas suggests in "In The Image of God," According to Rabbi Hayyim Volzhiner, 'the thought of Hayyim of Volozhin provides a 'learned exposition' of the 'system of Judaism and of Judaism as a system' (*IGRHV* 153; emphasis added). Evidently such a system, at least in its Mitnagdic form, prohibits the application of what Levinas will call the, 'face,' to the nonhuman creature.

signs' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 319; emphasis added). He will similarly insist that there is an 'autochthonous significance of the world which is constituted in the dealings which our incarnate consciousness has with it,' a significance or *sens*, moreover, which 'provides the basis of every deliberate *Sinngebung*' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 44). Despite the fact that for Merleau-Ponty such dealings are articulated by modes of possible comportment founded on, or rather in, a bodily 'I can,' and thus remaining at base actional (a point on which Levinas and Merleau-Ponty will disagree), are Levinas' descriptions of susceptibility any more outré, so to speak, than the suggestions broached by Merleau-Ponty here?

Surely though, as Heidegger reminds us (and here I believe Heidegger's remarks apply equally to the 'assumption' of the face that is the *praesuppositum* of and for my being susceptible to the face), 'hearkening' (*Horchen*) to something 'has the kind of Being' which 'understands.' That is to say, Dasein, 'as essentially understanding,' is 'proximally alongside what is understood.' Thus, for example, what we 'first' hear upon hearing something is 'never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motor-cycle,' or 'the woodpecker tapping.' Because we hearken to entities and not mere sensations we can be said to dwell alongside what is ready-to-hand within-the-world (BT §34 [163-164]).

Levinas notably, and quite rightly, contends that the other person does *not* belong to an instrumental complex (the other person transcends, absolutely, the referential totality (*Verweisungsganzheit*) of equipmental relations), and challenges the kind of dwelling (*Aufenthalt*) to which Heidegger alludes here. However, Levinas' aversion to the suggestion that the encounter with the Other is grounded in what Heidegger would call a certain 'fore-having' (*Vorhabe*) is less readily sustained. For how else, other than by a way of some kind of 'fore-sight' (*Vorsicht*) (BT §32 [150]), which, as it were, 'takes the first cut' (*anschneidet*) or, in the mordacious terms favoured by Levinas, the first bite, out of what has been encountered and permits it to be encountered *as* something definite, are we to explain why *me voici* is susceptible to the facesxphysiognomies of human beings alone, and susceptible to these in ways that are deliberate and pronounced. As Heidegger explains, 'the world which has already been disclosed beforehand permits what is within-the-world to be encountered.' Letting something 'be encountered is primarily *circumspective*.' It is not just 'sensing something,' or 'staring at it' for it implies 'circumspective concern, and has the character of becoming affected in some way.'



Furthermore, 'to be affected' is possible ontologically 'only insofar as Being-in as such has been determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that what it encounters within-the-world can "matter" to it in this way' (BT §29 [137]). Just as 'understanding' (*Verstehen*) and 'interpretation' (*Auslegung*) are basic to the existential constitution of Dasein in its 'there' (*Da*), so to, it seems, is discernment rudimentary to the delimitation of proto-ethical space and thus operative subcutaneously, let us say (to indulge the Levinasian figure of the subject ill at ease in its own skin – its skin being, contra Heidegger, precisely not its 'ownmost' (*eigenst*)) at the heart of susceptibility itself. It is not simply the Other (*Autrui*), therefore, but the others (*les Autres*), who are *under my skin* (*ont dans ma peau*), and they are there~~x~~here as the historico-structural horizon of tertiality against which I encounter the face as a 'face.'

Levinas may replace the Heideggerian *Als-Struktur* with his own ethical *Für-Struktur* (the-one-for-the-other), but this for-structure nonetheless retains aspects of the *Vor-Struktur* Heidegger so convincingly sets forth in the first division of *Being and Time*. Perhaps this is what Levinas means when he confers that the phenomenon of obsession is 'known but is not a knowing [*qui est sue mais n'est pas un savoir*]' (OBBE 88; AE 140). The 'neighbor strikes me before striking me,' because, to ape and modify the idiom of the *Daseinsanalytik*, qua responsal I arise out of a prior matrix of exposedness; a 'plot' (intrigue) to which I am bound (*je suis noué*) before being tied to the body *by which* I am susceptible to this or that person in this or that given situation (OBBE 76; AE 123). This matrix is, as I have intimated previously, an ethical transliteration of the Husserlian *Mutterboden*, which conditions the possibility of one's encountering anyone, or indeed anything, at all. To be sure, the structural totality of 'Care' (*Sorge*) which, according to Heidegger, lies before every factual 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein is 'ontologically 'earlier'' (*ist ontologisch früher*) than the phenomena of 'theory' (*Theorie*) and 'practice' (*Praxis*), 'Willing' (*Wollen*) and wishing' (*Wünschen*), which are exhibited in Dasein upon the prior ground of Care (BT §41 [193-194]). Care is also more originary than ethics understood as principia of conduct. Levinas contests the primordially of this structural whole, however, and thus pronounces ethical signification to be pre-originary and an-archic, by which, among other things, he means prior to the 'Care' structure outlined by Heidegger.

Such claims are apposite of course, but obviate the problem of how *me voici* comes to accord meaning to the trauma which afflicts it pre-originarily and how sense is 'made' of the proto-ethical *sens* that commands its attention. With Heidegger we may concur that 'mood' (*Stimmung*) is disclosive of the Being that Dasein 'is,' and that 'states-of-mind' (*Befindlichkeit*) disclose Dasein in its thrownness in a way that is more ontologically instructive than the phenomena of cognition and volition. Something need not be present-at-hand (*Vorhanden*), or admit of apodicticity, to be evident, Heidegger will assure us (*BT* §29 [136]). Likewise, we can accede to the suggestion that beyond any mere 'psychology of moods' (*Psychologie der Stimmungen*), Levinasian *Stimmungen* (or what Levinas would perhaps call *manières d'être*) such as remorse, shame and horror reveal the proto-ethical basis of one's being to be a *being-for-the-other*. Thus, the 'torsion of a complex [*la torsion du complexe*]' (*OBBE* 87; *AE* 138), revealed in the phenomena of fault and remorse, permits Levinas to execute a reduction beyond Being (and beyond the *Seinsweise* championed by Heidegger), to the situation of susception he believes to subtend them: a reduction to 'a susception in which meaning transpires [*susception où affleure le sens*]' (*CW* 168; *CV* 61). However, while susceptibility may be an-archic, the modification which the 'by' of my being affected 'by' another undergoes to become the 'for' of my suffering 'for' another is not, and already gestures to my submission to a 'world,' a world, moreover, in which the existential *Vor-Struktur* is undeniably operative, despite Levinas' protestations to the contrary.

Facial recognition (by which we do not mean that of the countenance), and the requisite modes of conduct that accompany it, are won through acquisition. They are heritable phenomena or strategies developed by the subject, or into which it develops, to enable it to 'cope,' in this instance charitably, with those it encounters. Such strategies are learnt, and while commonalities of approach obtain between individuals of the same 'community,' and 'ethical' norms fluctuate within a basic range of values and responses that are shared, differences between cultures, and indeed between members of the same community, remain and reinforce the validity of Heidegger's basic conviction that 'circumspective interpretation' (*der umsichtigen Auslegung*) is structurally fundamental to Being-in-the-world. Of course, Heidegger himself acknowledges that the *Als-Struktur* of interpretation may be instantiated in two ways, each corresponding, broadly speaking, to whether the 'as' of interpretation *understands* the entity it treats circumspectively and thus as ready-to-hand, or

discovers it to be present-at-hand, and thus the subject of assertoric statements. The 'as' of an act of interpretation that understands circumspectively, Heidegger terms the 'existential-hermeneutical "as"' (*das existenzial-hermeneutische 'Als'*) defining it in contrast to the 'apophantical 'as'' (*apophantischen 'Als'*) of an 'assertion' (*Aussage*) (*BT* §33 [158]), the former being the more obviously primordial phenomenon.

Perhaps, in order to clarify Levinas' position, one must supplement Heidegger's twofold exhibition of the 'as' with a third modality of interpretation, which we might invariably term the 'ethical 'as'' of susceptibility. Thus, just as assertion arises from circumspective interpretation by way of certain 'existential-ontological modifications [*existenzial-ontologischen Modifikationen*]' (*BT* §33 [157]) so too, one might argue, at the risk of exceeding the express intention of Levinas, does the existential-hermeneutical 'as' of the *Daseinsanalytik* issue from the ethical 'as' of susception (and it does so, moreover, as its modification). 'We are in the world,' according to which the Heideggerian *Als-Struktur* is adequate, yet 'the true life is absent' from this world (*TI* 33), and hence an alternative 'structure' is required to account for its occurrence: the for-the-other of proto-ethical obligation. As Levinas avers, 'the modification of sensibility into intentionality is *motivated* by the very signification of sensing as a for-the-other' (*OBBE* 71; emphasis added). Being-in-the-world corresponds, in the order of Levinas' ethical seriation, to the *situs* of the home or 'dwelling' (*la demeure*) from which the ego is displaced by the face of the Other (interiority, we recall, 'is accomplished concretely by the home' (*TI* 154), such concretion exhibited not only in the equipmental relations highlighted by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, but also by the nutrimental acts in which the ego engages, as set forth by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*). The 'feminine' presence which, Levinas maintains, welcomes one 'there,' a feminine presence that need not be equated with the presence of a woman in the home, since the 'home' is the extra-territorial *mise-en-scène* where the self establishes itself in Being (*TI* 158), 'teaches' the self a lesson in home economics, thereby 'instructing' it in the ways of the world, such worldly *Weise*, or *manières d'être*, being correlative with the rudimentary structures of Dasein's Being adduced by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.

One must leave the familial 'home' in due course, however, for one's coming of age (and it is precisely the ethical maturation of the self that Levinas intends to adumbrate with the phrase a 'Religion for Adults [*une religion d'adultes*]' (*DF* 11))

requires that one take the decidedly Abrahamic step of departing from the domiciliary environment of the homestead and venture toward the 'openness of space:' the 'outside.' Thus, 'to transcend oneself,' Levinas will assert, is 'to leave one's home to the point of leaving oneself,' to 'substitute oneself to another [*Se transcender, sortir de chez soi au point de sortir de soi, c'est se substituer à l'autre*]' (OBBE 182; AE 279). The 'voice' (*la voix*) that calls me forth from the 'shelter' of my self comes from another shore (*vient de l'autre rive*), Levinas insists, rather than from the hearth (OBBE 182; AE 280). First philosophy, *pace* Heidegger, is not hestiological. Even if one were to identify the 'field of intimacy [*le champ de l'intimité*]' (TI 155; *TeI* 166) extended by feminine being, with Ἑστία, this would not preclude Levinas from situating the region of ethics outside what he terms 'the subterranean digs [*la fouille souterraine*]' of the self (OBBE 195n.11; AE 172n.1). Although, significantly, Levinas will argue that the positive religion of 'Judaism' is 'the flaming hearth of all humanity' (ITN 30), a proposition seemingly at odds with the aforementioned claims and not a little Janiform given Levinas' sustained invective against Heidegger.

### § 19. *Pedagogical predicament*

One learns from the face/knee of one's 'parents' to recognise the summons of those who are not one's next-of-kin and with whom one is not consanguineous.<sup>5</sup> Although, as Levinas makes clear in *Beyond the Verse*, 'it should not be forgotten that *my* family and *my* people' are 'my "others"' since 'those near to me are also my neighbours' (BV xvii). Levinas is not, we must be clear, suggesting that one's 'familiarity' with the 'face' is the result of 'habits acquired in this world' (TI 154). Nor will he sanction the idea that ethics is in anyway instinctual or 'natural' (the proto-ethical structure Levinas describes is 'beyond instinct and beneath reason,' he confers (TI 138)), thus coming to heed the authority of the face is in no wise commensurate with the way 'maternal milk' is able to 'inscribe the movements of sucking in the instincts of the newly born' (OBBE 88; AE 140).<sup>6</sup> If the breast is to

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<sup>5</sup> This is a 'face,' or 'knee' (*genou*) (a rib can signify as a face thus why not a knee?), from which, as Llewelyn notes, 'one learns one's mother tongue' (Llewelyn, 1995, 94).

<sup>6</sup> This is unquestionably an allusion to a late, as of yet unpublished, manuscript by Husserl in which the latter, attempting to elucidate the nature of what he calls 'primal' intentionality, has recourse to

signify as a 'face,' and if for a moment we entertain the thought that our being might plausibly be *zum-Brust-sein*, at least, that is, until we are weaned from the ethico-genealogical stage of the domicile, then the breast in question signifies beyond ἔρως and otherwise than φύσις. If the teat teaches, it does so ethically, both as a figure for the manner in which, qua 'nurse' (OBBE 91), I support the Other, and as a trope for the concrete fixture of the domicile. Sensibility, in its 'signification to the maternal,' is 'prenatural' (*pré-naturelle*), we are to assume (OBBE 68; AE 111). Yet one's recognition of the 'face' already presupposes 'an intimacy with someone' (TI 155). Even if the face disturbs the intimacy of familiarity *status quo ante*, one must postulate an initial situation of familism in order to account for its latency.

One is taught *of* and *by* the face before one is in a position to receive it qua face. The ethical 'as' of susception is thus 'older' than the existential-hermeneutical 'as' of interpretation. One only 'sees' or 'grasps' this anteriority, however, after the fact (*après-coup*). Levinas will argue therefore, that the "vision" of the face as face is *a certain mode* of sojourning in a home' (TI 172; emphasis added). The domicile, the 'first concretisation [*concrétisation première*]' (TI 153; *Tel* 163) doubles, one might say, as a place of learning, a school (*école*) from which the responsible subject must graduate or from which it is forcibly 'expelled' (OBBE 48). As Bloechl observes:

If separated subjectivity sustains itself in "dwelling," the face of the other, as the apparition of a stranger, says not only "thou shall not kill," but also "thou shall not dwell." Why? Because it now turns out that individual existence is defined first and most deeply not by any ground or principle, but instead by a relation of proximity with his or her neighbor (Bloechl, 2000b, 243).

Arguing for a recovery of the strata of incomplete development that constitute our Dasein, David Wood notes that in Heidegger 'Dasein for the most part, seems to mean adult Dasein' (Wood, 2002, 225). Similarly, I would contend, in Levinas the ethical subject is no less 'adult' (the 'idea of being overflowing history makes

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illustrate his remarks through reference to the 'direction toward drinking' of the newborn. See, for example (Smith, 2003, 150).



possible *existents* both involved in being and personal,' Levinas confirms, existents who are 'called upon to answer at their trial and consequently *already adult*' (TI 23; emphasis added)). Might the transition between domiciliary life and the eu-topianism of exile not reflect the developmental progression of human maturation, and might this transitional phase not be appraised phenomenologically? Each phase of development possesses its own distinct ways of *Being-in-the-world* or 'dwelling,' the child and adolescent phases corresponding roughly to the ethico-genealogical stage of 'habitation' through which one must pass if one is to attain one's 'final reality' (*réalité dernière*) as an ethical subject (TI 178; Tel 194), yet upon which one depends *qua* base. Is ethical 'animation' not, after all, 'expressed by the metaphor of habitation,' as Levinas himself opines (OBBE 71)?

Arguably, Levinas fails to provide a credible account of the pedagogical predicament of his own *homo expositus* and despite treating the themes of filiation, fraternity, paternity, and maternity (and the domiciliary logic they either disrupt or presuppose) such themata do not attend sufficiently to the related problemata of how one *develops* proto-ethical sense and how one is *initiated* into (or, to employ a meteorological motif, of which there are many in Levinas' work, *acclimatized* to) one's condition of being susceptible *to* and *for* the face. For if the approach of the neighbour is 'a fission of the subject beyond lungs' (*fission du sujet au-delà du poumon*), then surely one must *learn* to breathe at 'ethical' elevation (OBBE 180; AE 277), and to assume the role of a pupil (*élève*); a process of assumption (*assomption*) inherently linked to the way in which one is reared (*élevage*), or to what we have called, heritability. Tropes aside, a hard and honest look at the spectacle of human life is enough to assure one that however gratuitous sacrificial acts may be, their apparent spontaneity is nourished aetiologically and such conditioning warrants careful analysis. If Levinas' ethic of ethics is to have any 'practical' application beyond the lectern, then the pedagogical infrastructure that belies and nourishes the kind of concrete ethical gestures it reduces must be explicated and assessed. The teaching 'methods' of the *yeshiva* are perhaps outmoded and their generality questionable.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The *yeshiva* is a form of Talmudic college; a place of study. Indeed, the Hebrew word means 'sitting, dwelling, meeting' (ITN xii). Levinas will endorse the pedagogy of the *yeshiva* and laud its rigor. It is clear from Levinas' 'Talmudic' writings that the *yeshiva* occupies a central place in his understanding of Judaism; above all the *yeshiva* exemplifies 'faithfulness to the Torah as culture' (IGRHV 153; emphasis added). As Levinas explains in 'The Pact,' the '*yeshiva* is one of three places

One may speak readily of a 'reverse conatus' (*un conatus à l'envers*) and extol an 'inversion of essence [*une inversion de l'essence*]' (OBBE 70; AE 114), however the transition between conatus and votary (or conatus and 'saint') is elucidated poorly by Levinas because he does not concretise his descriptions of ethical life sufficiently, nor refer to the development of the human being and how moral sense is intricate to this process. Had Levinas explored in greater depth the 'interval' between the two phases of hypostatic being he endorses (the hypostasis by which the ego overcomes the anonymity of brute being (*il y a*) and masters itself (i); and that by and through which the self is created qua responsal (ii)) he may have spared his analysis the inconsistency it suffers through its failure to consider how the susceptibility of the subject is pedagogically primed, that is, how susception, beyond the initial exposedness of affectivity, is cultivated, how cult and lore regulate susception in the dimension of its historicity.<sup>8</sup> Yes, as Levinas will say, 'in the touch itself' there is 'the possibility of a helping hand' (SE 66). No doubt too the 'caress is dormant in sensorial or verbal contact' (LP 125). But, the child orphaned during war and deprived of nurture may not *recognize* this, and while such cases of 'abnormality' in no way represent the whole spectrum of human affective responses, the findings of psycho-sociological research indicate that our capacity to love and show compassion, and our ability to tolerate and offer affection, are very much the products of socialization. We subjugate these issues at our peril as, indeed, Levinas does by dismissing the insights of psychoanalysis for perpetuating, as he puts it, the 'petrifying effects of myth' and degrading the dignity of the human subject (ET 40).

Again, it may be the case that proto-ethical susceptibility 'designates the depth of an undergoing that no *capacity* comprehends' (GP 139; emphasis added). However, the modification of the 'by' of affection into the 'for' of substitution (whether or not, as Levinas urges, substitution *is* the subjectivity of the subject) requires that one *possess*, to employ the terminology of section two of *Totality and*

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where the pact [with the Lord] is made.' The 'dignity of this place,' Levinas continues, 'equals that of Sinai, where the Torah is revealed, and that of the plains of Moab, where it is repeated by Moses' (TP 79).

<sup>8</sup> As Levinas himself avers, 'a *true* culture,' and the cult(ure) of the face is no exception to this rule, I would maintain, 'cannot be summed up, for it resides in the very effort to cultivate it' (DF 252; emphasis added). Of course, by 'true' culture Levinas means Jewish culture and, more pointedly, Talmudic culture, a culture to be distinguished, at all costs, from its 'pagan' counterparts. It is a shame Levinas does not grant the so called 'pagan' the same cultural privileges he accords to Judaism. Needless to say, these are themes to which we will return proximately.

*Infinity*, a developed capacity to be *moved* morally or animated ethically (that one be of age ethically, that one be kinas-ethically agile). In instances where the conversion of the 'by' into the 'for' does not transpire, one may have to speak of *suspended animation*. If a being is, *for whatever reason*, not 'capable of receiving a revelation,' or incapable of 'learning that it is created' (TI 89), then its chances of 'accomplishing its destiny' as a creature, begin to wane (VO 113). I cannot 'escape' the face of the neighbour, Levinas affirms, 'without defaulting, incurring fault, *or being caught up in some complex*' (GP 143; emphasis added). Yet Levinas will provide no indication of what these complexes are, the nature of their complexification, nor under what circumstances they impinge upon the 'productivity' of proto-ethics.

This is perhaps another reason why Levinas does not accord the nonhuman proto-ethical signification: the nonhuman creature lacks any discernible 'capacity' to accede to the status of creaturality. Even the dog 'Bobby,' of whom Levinas writes in the essay 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights' (1975) – the dog who recognized, with his attendant bark, the humanity of Levinas and his fellow prisoners of war while they were held captive by the Nazis – lacked the 'brain' (NDNR 153), and hence the capacity, for susceptibility, while clearly recognising the captives as humans and enjoying their companionship (despite being, as Heidegger would say, *weltarm* or poor in world (FCM §45 [274])). Although Levinas will urge that 'biological human brotherhood is not a sufficient reason for me to be responsible for a separated being' (GP 142; emphasis added), it would appear, nevertheless, that responsibility is predicated upon the 'I can' of species-being, upon likeness and like-mindedness. Apparently then, there are no animals, domesticated or feral, in the Levinasian 'home,' since proto-ethics is stubbornly humanocentric and prohibits the application of the 'face' to the nonhuman creature. Surely an instance of domestic abuse and an affront to the laws of the οἰκός. We may all be the descendents of Abraham, as Levinas avers (JR 99), but our terrene ancestry is elided by Levinas to the point that the phylogeny of the face, to which he appeals, displays no earthly precedent. And yet does Levinas himself not cite Dostoyevsky in support of the suggestion that 'every one of us is guilty *before all*, for everyone *and everything*, and I more than others...' (TDTT 102; emphasis added)? Might one not, indeed, be responsible 'for everything,' including those beings for whom the attestation of

Levinas (the attestation that is the work of Levinas' work (*oeuvre*)) does not bear witness?<sup>9</sup>

## § 20. *The discipline of study*

*Totality and Infinity* might have profited from a more rigorous phenomenological appraisal of 'tuition' and the processes of inculcation and socialization (perhaps pursued under the heading of 'Lore'), the way in which it considered the ontological importation of the domicile. The passage from interiority to metaphysical exteriority involves a rite of passage, a graded and graduated education. If the 'approach of the other is *an initiative I undergo*,' as Levinas states (*OBBE* xxiii; emphasis added), and if, by default, I am an initiate, then my initiation is an ordeal which I must not only endure repeatedly (which is the sense, I think, Levinas intends to convey with this remark), but one that presupposes a period of naturalization in which I *become* habituated to the injunctive environment of the face. This passage is not accomplished spontaneously. The conversion in question must be traced back to the horizons of its constitution, horizons apt for phenomenological disquisition. As Husserl will stress in a late manuscript, '*proper schooling is required* in order to stay within the bounds of pure givenness' (Bernet, 1993, 60) (apparently Husserl was something of a delinquent, one must assume, since he erred from the rigour of this teaching), as it is, I would argue, for one to be rendered susceptible to the face and its provocation.

Levinas, of course, would have been well qualified to have undertaken such an analysis. In his role as Director of the École Normale Israélite Orientale (ENIO) in Paris, located at 59 rue d'Auteuil (and later on the rue Michel-Ange in the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*) he was involved in the training of teachers for Jewish schools (principally schools located in the Mediterranean basin). In the ENIO Levinas was responsible for Talmudic studies and took a particular interest in the pedagogical problems facing Jewish educators after the *Shoah*. It is hardly surprising (particularly considering that Levinas did not take up a university position until 1964, when he was in his fifties) that the thematic of teaching should feature, albeit somewhat elliptically, in *Totality and Infinity* and preoccupy Levinas in his Hebraic writings,

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<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Levinas will again cite Dostoyevsky in *Otherwise than Being*. However on this occasion he omits from his citation of the latter the phrase 'for everything' (*OBBE* 146)!

especially the text *Difficult Freedom* (1963), which contains a number of important essays on pedagogical themes.

Evidently the rabbinical model of learning haunts the pages of *Totality and Infinity*, and Levinas will speak enthusiastically of the 'freedom of the master and student' (TI 181). It is clear from Levinas' Talmudic writings that this model is held to be of paradigmatic value. The submission of the 'student' to the 'Master' upon which this model is based is somewhat arcane though, and phenomenological scrutiny might well be brought to bear upon the axiological, sociological and indeed religious horizons that interlace to condition of the kind of 'teaching' (non-maieutic or otherwise) to which Levinas refers here. Levinas may well repudiate such remarks by stating that the face-to-face *dé-structure* is instantiated in the pedagogical relationship between Talmudic scholar and student (the latter, in many ways, serving as the paragon of face-to-face relations), but does not reside there exclusively. Such qualification does not prohibit Levinas from acclaiming the 'teacher-pupil relationship' to be the 'first radiant sign of messianism itself' (MT 86), however, and one may wonder whether this idealized relationship does justice to the genera that are its purported heirs.<sup>10</sup>

Now, as Kosky reasons, the Levinasian articulation of responsibility is possible only insofar as the Jewish tradition has 'endowed our historicity' with 'the themes and "logic" necessary for its phenomenological discovery in the heart of the self as such.' The 'phenomenology of responsibility and the historical fact of Judaism are co-implicated,' therefore (Kosky, 2001, 169-170). This accord, which Kosky adumbrates but does not probe, is sustained, I believe, by practices as well as 'themes,' and the 'logic' Kosky identifies here extends beyond the internal coherence of thought, to embrace the comportment of knowledge and the discipline of study; much in the way, I would argue, that the 'work-world' Heidegger describes in the first division of *Being and Time* is the situation for our handling of concepts and 'tools' alike. To treat phenomena, *in concreto*, is to treat the concrete practices through which they are presented and the manner in which they are given. The 'phenomenological way,' Levinas will himself insist, 'consists in recovering these

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Levinas is not alone among phenomenologists in lauding the merits of the teacher-pupil relationship. In *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger acknowledges a proto-ethical significance in the relationship between teacher and student, clearly placing himself in the role of the former and his readers in the position of the latter (Heidegger, 1968, 50)!



access routes' (*RPT* 96). As Levinas explains in *Beyond the Verse*, according to the Jewish tradition study of the Torah 'is the highest level of life where knowledge is no longer distinguished from imperatives and practical impulses, where science and conscience meet, where reality and justice no longer belong to two distinct orders. It is as if the human were to rise to it by attaining *a new condition*, a new mode of the spirituality of the spirit' (*CR* 47).

It is the study of the Torah, and the act of studying, that endow Levinas with the exegetical resources to enable him to perform his drash of phenomenology. Ultimately Levinas disparate works form a collection of Midrashim on philosophical method (despite the fact that, as Levinas himself confers, 'transparency' in method is not possible (*QA* 89)). Such methods are supplemented (and reappraised) by the methodological procedure Levinas inherits from phenomenology. His re-appropriation of both 'traditions' is critical, one must conclude.<sup>11</sup>

Levinas will call, then, for what, in *In the time of the Nations*, he will term a 'liturgy of study,' a 'liturgy of study as lofty as obedience to the precepts' that fulfil that study. This study, moreover, is 'never ending' for it attests to the 'incompleteness that is the law of love,' the 'coming of a world that never ceases coming' and the entering into 'covenant with a transcendent will' (*CTI* 59). 'God' is not incarnate therefore, so much is inscribed in the letters of the Torah (*la Thora*) and 'in the lines and *between the lines* and in the exchange of ideas *between* the readers commenting upon them' (*CTI* 59). These 'lines' are trans-epochal (a further instantiation of the phenomena of filiation and infinity), and although Levinas is speaking on this occasion in relation to the 'study' of the Torah, study being beyond the Greek distinction between *prāxis* (πρᾶξις) and *theōria* (θεωρία), something one must 'observe' (*lishmor*), 'do' (*la'asot*), 'learn' (*lilmod*), and 'teach' (*lelamed*) (*TP* 76), his comments apply equally to the way in which he understands the dissemination of philosophical sense. Hence, in *Otherwise than Being* he will describe the practice of philosophy in which he participates as a 'drama *between* philosophers' (*un drame entre philosophes*), a drama 'sketched out' (*se dessine*)

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<sup>11</sup> In the light of these remarks, Adam Newton's comments are again instructive. Levinas' approach to the 'rabbinic tradition,' Newton suggests, 'is to see it as a *certain kind of philosophy*, and the Doctor's of the Talmud as *certain kinds of philosophers* who practise a *characteristic philosophical method*, in the midst of their performance of *Talmud Torah* as *mitzvah*...doing philosophy (enacting it)...Jewishly' (Newton, 2001, 35).

structurally as the 'history of philosophy' (*OBBE* 20; *AE* 39). To be sure, this structure is generative and defined principally by its heritability: it is emergent rather than static.<sup>12</sup>

We may conclude then, that what we have nominated under the heading of the ethical *Als-Struktur* (a structure that brings to light one's pre-originary condition of susceptibility) is, like the existential-hermeneutical 'as' elucidated by Heidegger, a structure, furthermore, that is 'grounded in the ecstatico-horizonal unity of temporality' (*BT* §69 [360]), engendered and renewed generatively. The ethical as-structure, an as-structure 'inscribed,' one might say, in the body *as* elevation (*TI* 117) (and here let us recall our previous identification of 'height' with heritability), that is, *as* the susceptibility that renders me vulnerable and open to others, produces the schema of presentification (*Schema der Gegenwärtigung*) through which one *comes to recognize* the face *as* injunctive. This structure is installed through education and reinforced through lore, processes in which Levinas, qua *meforesh* or expounder, is actively engaged. As Husserl notes in 'The Vienna Lecture,' truth 'becomes an absolute value through the movement of education and its constant effects in the training of children.' The 'ideal norms' that govern cultural life (the ethical primacy of the 'face' being no exception in this regard) issue from this movement, which in turn occasions a transformed cultural 'praxis' (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 287).

Levinas' deductions are thus educative and instructive. His ethico-metaphysical 'descriptions' blend the empirical and the transcendental and are arguably a composite of four modes of utterance: prescription, proscription, presentation and proclamation. One is chastened by the face, or at the very least, forced to question the probity of a life of self-interest, through the descriptions of the 'face' Levinas offers. With Husserl we may concur that '*what* is perceived is also [and always] something *meant*;' the 'act of meaning' thereby "*lives*" in the act of perceiving' (*PIT* §43 [90]; emphasis added). In Levinas' case, one must conclude that the discipline of study *informs* the passivity of susception (no doubt a peculiarly Talmudic brand of hylomorphism), Levinas' own work serving this pedagogical end

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<sup>12</sup> This is a point made to good effect by Husserl in the *Crisis*. There, Husserl describes the embedment of philosophical practice in a tradition of thought and hermeneutical understanding. The philosopher is one who has '*gone through* [and is going through] a philosophical education' which instructs his or her reception and subsequent interpretation of texts and 'philosophical' problems. See *Crisis*, Appendix IX, p. 393.

and calling philosophy to account before the 'face' it describes. A face the 'tradition' in question more often than not ex-scribes from its margins.

In *Of God who comes to Mind*, Levinas provides the following reflection (heavily indebted to Heidegger) upon the process of learning. Learning, he affirms, 'entails a grasping, a *hold* on what is learned and a possession.' The "'grasping" of learning is not purely metaphorical,' he continues, 'even before technical interestedness, this learning is already *an outline of an incarnate practice*, already "hands on" (*mainmise*), main-tenance' (D 138). Susceptibility and teachability are synonymous, I would thus contend. And since 'learning' is characterized by its maintenance, the reactivation and repetition of 'what' is learnt, the non-site (*non-lieu*) of subjectivity surely dissimulates a tenancy of sorts because the outline or schema (σχῆμα) of the face is *grasped* by the 'I,' a feat attested to by the fact that the oneself, according to Levinas, is only susceptible to human provocation. Education is in-finition, one might say, a proposal altogether consonant with Levinas' belief that the 'transmission' (*transmission*) of 'spiritual' sense 'involves a teaching which is *already outlined in the very receptivity for learning it* [*se dessine dans la réceptivité même de l'apprendre*]' (TP 79; LeP 99). Sense is drawn forth (*se dessine*) or draughted between generations, and admits of its own historicity. Therefore, where Dasein 'takes space in' (BT §70 [368]), the Levinasian subject inherits the schema of the 'face.' *Me voici takes face in*, or is *taken in by* the face, I would contend.

As I have suggested above, the face schematizes the understanding (which as Heidegger makes clear is itself grounded in temporality) by which the subject abides. The 'spatiality' of *me voici*, the amplitude and extent of its sense of responsibility for the 'everywhere of faces' (OBBE 197n.22) that face it, is determined by the generosity of the schemata it internalises, or let us say ingests (and might not the phenomenon of 'remorse,' unbeknownst to Levinas, disclose the limitations of the schema of the face he presents?), a procedure that is in no way passive since the subject must repeat and constantly realign itself with what it has learnt in order to 'maintain' it in practice, even if 'what' it has learnt does not admit of quiddity as such. In consonance with what Husserl terms the law of 'transcendental generation [*der transzendentalen Genesis*]' (CM §32 [100]) the subject *acquires* the schema of the face *by which* it regulates its comportment vis-à-vis others. The scope of my ethical out-reach (invariably a form of spection) is proportionate with and to my impressionability qua 'student' and whether or not, and here let us recall Levinas'

endorsement of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and the latter's contention that the organs of the human body are subject to the norms of the Torah (*IGRHV* 158), one can *stomach* what one has been taught about oneself.

Of course, we may ourselves have given the impression that ethical intuition is simply a question of following a rule, that one's susceptibility to the face is entirely a product of assumption. This is not our express intention. For if the face teaches itself (this is to presume that there *is* a 'face,' the status of the copula being moot, although as we have insisted, the face is itself a heritable phenomenon) then susceptibility, albeit delimited by assumption, describes an a priori attunement to the 'face.' One is, apropos of Levinas, awakened to the face, after all, and sobered up from self-interest. As Heidegger proffers in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, a transformation of Dasein, which thereby involves a transformation in the self-understanding of Dasein, does *not* occur:

through the apron strings of instruction but from out of a free ability to hearken to things...True understanding never proves its mettle in repeating something after someone, but only in its power to lead understanding into genuine action (*FCM* §70 [299-300]).

Certainly, as we have seen, Levinas and Heidegger will disagree over the precise form such propitious acts ought to take and the manner in which one is bound to and by one's actions. But the hearkening (*Horchen*) Heidegger ascribes to Dasein here, attributes Dasein with a freedom Levinas will in turn grant to the flesh in its immediacy, a liberty beyond initiative to welcome the 'face' by which it is, somewhat paradoxically, held hostage. Writing in the essay 'God and Philosophy,' Levinas expresses this predicament thus, intimating that 'my responsibility in spite of myself,' which is, he continues, the 'way the other's charge falls upon me,' simply 'is the hearing or understanding of their cry' (*GP* 143; emphasis added). Moreover, this obedience, Levinas states, 'precedes any hearkening unto the commandment' to be for-the-other (*TDTT* 105).

The 'new condition' (*la nouvelle condition*), or 'new mode of the spirituality of the spirit' (*le mode nouveau de la spiritualité de l'esprit*), Levinas identifies as the boon of Torah study (*CR* 47; *VR* 65), is called forth in the 'student' by the 'Master.' However, as Levinas adverts in 'On the Jewish Reading of Scriptures,' if 'the human

*begins* when the apparently innocent but virtually murderous vitality is brought under control *by interdicts*,’ and furthermore, ‘*authentic* civilization consists in holding back the breath of naïve life and remaining fully awake in this way, “for generations and generations to come, to the end of all generations”’ (JR 106; emphasis added), then are we compelled to accept the accord between education and civilization Levinas broaches here? Indeed, this mooted of an ‘authentic’ civilization is problematic, not least because it mires Levinas’ thought in the same logic of accession that troubles the Heideggerian *Daseinsanalytik*. For how does ‘one’ (let alone an entire civilization) traverse the straits of ‘inauthenticity’ to accede to the status of ‘authenticity,’ and what form might such a collective act of resoluteness assume, given Dasein’s propensity for dispersion in the ‘They’ (*das Man*)? Such an alliance as that to which Levinas consents here, may be deleterious, and prompt one, in a kind of cultural *Jemeinigkeit*, to identify so called civility with one’s own customs and traditions, and, moreover, to disclaim the cultural difference of others – a danger all too apparent in Levinas’ own critique of ‘pagan’ religiosity. Ethical signification is undoubtedly heritable, a schema (σχήμα) secured through acquisition and confirmed as normative through the reiteration of its performance, a performance inscribed in and by bodily practices, among which one may number the phenomenon of ‘study’ Levinas approves.

Both the *sens* of ethics and the compass of obligation are trans-epochal phenomena. Levinas’ analysis of ethical susceptibility contributes to the way in which the *dé-structure* he explicates develops historically. As Llewelyn observes, Levinas, like Hegel before him, ‘writes a drama of the education of the psyche,’ a performance in many acts (Llewelyn, 1995, 3). Yet, the ‘face’ Levinas deduces, a face whose imperative force draws upon the weight of Jewish traditional teachings, is morally probative only within the limits of its heritability. In Levinas’ work these limits are delineated and regulated by the confluence *between* the Jewish and philosophical orders of inquiry to which he adheres. Levinas’ ‘phenomenology’ is a phenomenology of miscegenation, therefore, and as the product of such dissemination or ‘bestrewal’ (*Streuung*) it must, at least insofar as it seeks to remain true to its generative origins, maintain its openness to heterodox perspectives. Against the inter-cultural, trans-epochal horizon(s) of ‘faciality,’ new phenomena may arise for which the Levinasian articulation of the ‘face’ is inadequate. The discipline of phenomenology is indebted to Levinas for drawing its attention to such



vistas. However it risks dissolution if it does not pursue the importation of Levinas' thinking beyond the form of its presentation.

It is my belief that Levinas' thought hastens to reach 'adulthood' too soon. By which I mean, it fails to consider the transitional fora through which the existent must pass en route to ethical maturity. One may thus deem Levinas' philosophy precocious, as the thought of Nietzsche, by the latter's own admission, is premature (Nietzsche, 1974, 182 [125]). To be sure, the condition of creaturality (*la créaturalité*) set forth by Levinas in later works such as *Otherwise than Being*, is not a phase through which one passes, nor the term of volitional activity, but rather the situation of pre-originary exposedness by which the subject (*le sujet*) is defined. However, since the susceptibility to which Levinas assents is epicritical, as I hope to have demonstrated, it is henceforth phasic, even if susceptibility is not. 'Adolescence' names a phenomenon or developmental epoch, which, like the phenomena of filiation and paternity, must not be restricted to its empirical or biological manifestation, a truly climacteric phase in the formation of the subject Levinas describes. (And let us not forget that the term itself is derived from the Latin word *adolēscere*, meaning *to grow up* or *develop*, which is suggestive both of the hypostatisation of the ego Levinas outlines in *Existence and Existents*, and subsequently reprises in *Otherwise than Being*, and the heritability of the face, as we have understood it. And this despite the fact that, as Kosky contends, Levinas' use of the term 'recurrence' often 'implies that the responsible self *does not develop or grow beyond itself* but repeats itself' (Kosky, 2001, 92; emphasis added).)

How one is *initiated* into holding beliefs and *assuming* practices is a stage (*étape*) in phenomenological explication to which we must attend, a stage (to be sure, anything but stative) to which the account of domiciliation assayed in *Totality and Infinity* does not do justice. The key to understanding the provenance and sedimentation of religiosity, or what Levinas will term 'orientation' (*orientation*), or 'sense' (*sens*), arguably lies here. The 'adult's God' may be 'revealed' through the 'void of the child's heaven,' as Levinas avers (*LTMG* 143), but the *mise-en-abîme* of what I have termed 'adolescence,' must be negotiated first. Did Levinas himself, bearing witness to the teaching of Isaiah 6:8, not identify the 'oneself' (and thus himself) with the formulation 'Here I am! Send me' (*OBBE* 199n.11), an obedience to the law of generation, a law I have sought to adumbrate in this chapter, in which

the trace of what Levinas will call, a 'wandering cause' (*cause errante*), is glimpsed (*OBBE* 150; *AE* 235)?

It is to the further consideration of the heritable status of sense (*sens*) that we now turn, with a view to bringing into relief the figure of the subject in whom the schema (σχῆμα) of the face is 'outlined.' Might the 'plot' (*intrigue*) of ethics not require management if one is not, as Levinas puts it, 'to abandon oneself to violence [*s'abandonner à la violence*]' (*OBBE* 193n.33; *AE* 146n.1)?

#### 4. EDUCATION

Levinas will contend that the subject is 'produced' or 'created' through exposure to the other person. In *Totality and Infinity*, such production is construed in actional terms, with the existent being called upon to 'seek' its 'final reality' (TI 178) and to 'purge itself interminably' of itself (TI 244). It is by way of this 'purgation' that the existent 'surpasses' Being (TI 302). By the publication of *Otherwise than Being*, these actional components have been largely expunged from the 'field' of proto-ethics, and in their wake notions of radical passivity, defection and creaturalty have been installed to accentuate the hetero-affection (*l'hétéro-affection*) which, Levinas believes, characterizes the subjection of the oneself to another (OBBE 121; AE 193). But why 'surpass' Being; and what does Levinas intend to convey with this directive? We have hitherto intimated that the curved space of ethical transaction is located (qua *événement*) outside the nexus of instrumental relations outlined by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Ethical space substructures the pratognostic space of equipmentality ('the cordon of totality' cannot accommodate the transcendence of the one-for-the-Other, Levinas will insist (OBBE 95)). It may be that 'uncanniness' (*Unheimlichkeit*) is a more primordial phenomenon than Being-at-home (*Zuhause-sein*) and that the anxiety it generates is ontologically 'older' than the self-assurance the latter inspires. The 'nothingness' in the face of which Dasein flees (a τόπος that haunts the interstices of equipmentality and permeates the world of the 'everyday') is disclosive of the Being that Dasein 'is,' and it is exhibited, Heidegger adverts, in the state-of-mind of anxiety (*Angst*).

Levinas does not agree with Heidegger that anxiety is pre-eminent among 'moods,' nor, indeed, that it is the *Grundbefindlichkeit*, or basic state-of-mind (BT §40 [188]). For Levinas, the most 'revelatory' mood or *manière d'être* is arguably 'shame' (*la honte*), and it is to a consideration of this 'mood' that we now turn our critical attention. The foregoing investigation has led us to question Levinas' delimitation of ethical space and to contest the 'spacing' (*espacement*) of its basic terms. In this chapter, the situation of the subject will be exhibited and its ethical 'maturation' brought into focus. How, it will be asked, does the subject (*le sujet*) manage the 'trauma' (*le trauma*) that afflicts it and moderate the excesses of diacony? To what extent does Levinas modify the terms of the face-to-face relation in order to accommodate the subject in its indigency? We enquire, therefore, after the care of the 'soul,' since the place, or rather the non-place of the soul is, according to Levinas, the

τόπος where ethics *takes place*, the site where the relationship with the Other is dramatized.

## § 21. *The torsion of identity*

Shame, which as early as the 1935 work, *De l'Evasion*, had come to denote the fact of being 'riveted to oneself [*rivé à soi-même*]' (OE 66; DE 90), assumes a position of prominence in Levinas' mature works. There it 'reveals' one's responsibility for another through the 'scruple' (*scrupule*) or 'remorse' (*remords*) with which one is stricken upon refusing to accept one's responsibility (OBBE 6). Again, let us be clear, qua *manière-d'être*, shame, like anxiety, need not manifest itself as one's being shameful about 'something' definite. One is shameful, principally, about the Being that one is. Thus, what Heidegger says of anxiety remains pertinent to shame, namely that 'the disclosure and the disclosed are existentially self same' (BT §40 [188]).<sup>1</sup> Like fatigue and indolence, shame is marked by reflexivity. As Levinas claims in *Existence and Existents*, one exists oneself (*on s'est*) (EE28; DEE 38) and so too with the phenomenon of shame: *one* shames *oneself* (or *one* is ashamed of *oneself*). Shame, contra anxiety, does not reveal our 'nothingness,' therefore, but rather 'the totality of our existence' (OE 65).<sup>2</sup> It is this ek-sistence of which the existent must take leave if it is to divest itself of itself for the-sake-of-others. But again, why quit the order of Being? What motivates this venture? The answer to these questions ought, by now, to be apparent, but let us briefly recapitulate Levinas' position in an effort to elucidate these points further.

The ego, in its natural state, is prone to gulosity. The life of enjoyment is defined primarily by appropriation. One lives *off* and *from* the other (*l'autre*). One enjoys oneself, taking up one's residence in Being at the Other's expense. The ego is edacious and given to the satisfaction of its desires. This life of wanton self-interest is homely, or, as Levinas will say, 'sedentary' (HGV 232), because it is *preoccupied* with itself. It is this existence, this 'world,' which the Other calls into question, and he or she does so, initially (*Totality and Infinity*), and ab-originally (*Otherwise than Being*), by awakening in the 'I' what, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas will call 'the consciousness of moral unworthiness [*la conscience de l'indignité morale*]' (TI 83;

<sup>1</sup> Levinas will concede that he has wondered 'whether the anxiety that the Other causes the Same is not the meaning of reason, its very rationality: the anxiety of man caused by the Infinite of God.'

'Inspiration,' Levinas continues, 'is the originary mode of anxiety' (RIJT 147). Pace Heidegger, then, anxiety is not animated by the nothing, but by the Other.

<sup>2</sup> Let us recall, however, that for Heidegger ultimately 'Being: Nothing: Same' (Heidegger, 1969, 101), a situation that undoubtedly complicates Levinas' rebuttal of Heidegger here.

*Tel* 82), or what in *Otherwise than Being*, he will term ‘the self-accusation of remorse [*l’auto-accusation du remords*]’ (*OBBE* 125; *AE* 198-199). In both instances the *Ego* is uprooted from itself, and the subject is invested with a newfound ‘freedom,’ a freedom radically different from the ‘spontaneity of freedom’ (*la spontanéité de la liberté*) (*TI* 83; *Tel* 81) by which, qua *Ego*, it had been identified, a freedom that is in no way the ‘initiative’ of an *Ego* closed in upon itself (*OBBE* 115). This freedom is the freedom of humility and not power (*MS* 56), the freedom to either ‘feel myself to be the other of the other,’ or not (*TI* 84). *I am presented to myself by the Other* only to discover that ‘I am not innocent spontaneity but usurper and murderer [*je ne suis pas innocente spontanéité, mais usurpateur et meurtrier*]’ (*TI* 84; *Tel* 83).

It is as such that shame is ‘produced,’ and it draws its revelatory force from the fact that in the midst of the reflexivity of (my) shame I am nonetheless *oriented toward* the Other. As Levinas explains, the Other ‘is desired *in* my shame’ (*TI* 84). According to the logic of this deduction, I do *not* choose to feel ashamed. This is a ‘state’ with which I am afflicted, an affection into which I am thrown. I rather elect to side either with the ‘usurper’ in me, or the ‘votary’ in me; an election based upon my pre-originary electability. In one and the same moment (in one and the same breath), I am both for myself (self-affected) and for-the-other (hetero-affected).<sup>3</sup> This moment is, of course, structured diachronically and reflects the amphibological nature of the self, a self which according to Levinas is at once both *under* erasure (accused) and *under* obligation (summoned) and thus very much a sub-ject (the self is a ‘sub-jectum,’ Levinas will argue (*OBBE* 116)). Derrida summarizes Levinas’ position as follows:

Each time this interruption of self takes place or is produced, each time this delimitation of self, which might also pass for an excess or transcendence of self, is produced, a process of deconstruction is in progress, which is no longer a teleological process or even a simple event in the course of history (Derrida, 1999, 80).

One cannot determine the ‘instant’ the other wrenches me from self-sufficiency because the ethical *event* of interruption takes place (it eventuates) on the hither side of egoity and outside the time in which consciousness *resides*. To be sure, ‘one *can* uproot oneself from this responsibility’ and ‘deny the place where is incumbent upon

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<sup>3</sup> As Llewelyn confers, ‘self-affection is affection by the distance kept in the approach of the other’ (Llewelyn, 2000, 164). I am affected by the interval of separation (*Kedousha*), the distance between the Other and myself, therefore.



one to do something' (*PU* 100; translation altered). To do so, Levinas assures us, is to align oneself with 'evil,' however, and to disregard the Other in her plight. And what if I am alone, one may ask? Do I persist with my usurpation in the absence of another? Let us clarify. Being-with (*Mitsein*), as we have seen, is constitutive of the Being Dasein is. Similarly, for Levinas, the subject is susceptible. 'The body,' Levinas will confer, 'is the very susceptibility of the Self' (*BPW* 182n.27).

The affect of shame merely reveals my pre-original condition of being-for-the-other, *an orientation* I can either accept or decline. 'I am circumscribed and concerned by the other' (*OBBE* 80), then, as the unitary phenomenon of 'Care' pertains to the structural whole of Dasein, an inversion of the circumspection with which Dasein attends its environing work-world. I am thus assigned before I am able to recognise my assignation because I am caught up in the 'plot' of proximity; a spatial field (akin to the phenomenal field but not centred upon the Ego as its point of origination) in which I am bound to others irrespective of their 'physical' propinquity to me. As Levinas argues in the essay 'Language and Proximity' (1967), 'the I is the point that bears the gravity of the world' (*LP* 123). Arguably, this conceptualization of space is already prefigured in *Being and Time*. There, for example, Heidegger states that: 'in Dasein there lies an essential tendency towards closeness' (*BT* §23 [105]). To be *in proximity*, that is, to occupy a proximal space, is rudimentary to the Being of Dasein. Moreover, space, Heidegger continues, adding an important proviso to his analysis of deseverance and directionality, 'need not have the kind of Being characteristic of something which is itself spatially ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Nor does the Being of space have the kind of Being which belongs to Dasein' (*BT* §24 [112]).<sup>4</sup>

Ethical space exhibits a magnitude that implicates 'me' in relations with others across the 'dead time' (*le temps mort*) that separates me from those who precede and proceed me in the sequential time of history. Ethical space is fecund, therefore, because it is the 'field in which the production of infinity is enacted [*le champ même où cette production de l'infini se joue*]' (*TI* 26; *TeI* 11), the field in which the familial-cum-generative relations of filiality, fraternity, paternity and maternity are effectuated (and once again let us take heed: the 'biological structure of fecundity is *not* limited to

<sup>4</sup> In fact, as Heidegger intimates in 'On the Essence of Ground' (1929), 'only being able to listen into the distance *awakens* Dasein as a self to the response of other Dasein in whose company [*Mitsein*] it can surrender its I-ness, so as to attain itself as an authentic self...and so the human being, existing as a transcendence that exceeds in the direction of possibilities, is a creature of distance' (Heidegger, 1998 [1929], 135). That Dasein should attain authenticity through surrendering itself to others is seemingly lost on Levinas, at least in so far as he is willing to acknowledge the proto-ethical aspect of Heidegger's thought.

the biological fact' (TI 306)). It is by way of the encounter with the face, and the commerce with exteriority, that 'I' am revealed to myself qua *conatus essendi*,<sup>5</sup> suffer shame, and am thereby brought back to myself on the hither side of my 'I.' Dasein may be in each case mine (*Jemeinig*), but the Levinasian subject is amphibological because it embodies this alternance or torsion of identity and *bears it as its own*. The *Eigensphäre*, one might say, is a sphere of conflict, a bellicose space in which one is *at war with oneself*. If, for example, 'eating to take pleasure in eating,' that is, 'to take pleasure in oneself,' is 'disgusting,' and thus that it is only insofar as eating and drinking 'concern the other' that such activities 'become sacred' (IFP 46, 52), then the sincerity with which, in *Existence and Existents*, Levinas awards 'life,' is in need of qualification. Levinas will argue in the essay 'No Identity,' that the word 'sincerity' takes on its full meaning as deliverance (NI 146). Similarly, in 'God and Philosophy,' he states that sincerity names the self in its 'extraversion' (GP 145).

Now, alimentation may be a figure for the appetitive drives or *appetitus* of the self. However, trope or no trope, the existent will undoubtedly suffer the pain of chronic, or perhaps rather, diachronic, pyrosis if its enjoyment of the element (*l'élément*) is, as Levinas contends, frustrated in its exercise by the immediacy of remorse. A 'groaning of the entrails [*gémissement des entrailles*]' (OBBE 75; AE 121) besets the subject, it seems; a condition latent, yet undiagnosed, in *Totality and Infinity*, where we are informed that the element in which we bathe presents us with the reverse of reality 'as though we were in the bowels of being [*dans les entrailles de l'être*]' (TI 132; TeI 139). Ribaldry aside, if the subject, qua *corps éthique*, is the 'regime of separation [*le régime de la séparation*]' (TI 168; TeI 182), the place where 'a separation is occurring' (TOT 49) and a reversal of essence is underway, if that is, the field of animatological space (the space of the 'soul' or *âme*) is at once at 'crossroads of physical forces [*un carrefour de forces physiques*]' (TI 164; TeI 177)

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<sup>5</sup> The *conatus* to which Levinas refers throughout his many opera is something of a philosophical opificus, drawing upon a disparate array of influences for its determination. To be sure, the *conatus essendi*, or *nisus* toward self-preservation, detailed by Spinoza in his *Ethics* is foremost in Levinas' mind here. Hence, the thesis set forth in *Totality and Infinity* is, Levinas states, 'at the antipodes of Spinozism' (TI 105). Spinoza had identified 'the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being' as 'nothing but the actual essence of the thing' (Spinoza, 1996, 75 [III.7]). The movement *beyond essence* to which Levinas gives voice is a move beyond the essence of *this* being. Needless to say, the Heideggerian delineation of Dasein as 'ek-sistence' (Heidegger, 1996 [1947], 231) – the 'essence of Dasein lies in its existence' (BT §9 [42]) – is, no doubt, expedited under the heading of the *conatus* together with Darwin's appropriation of the Spencerian apophthegm, 'the survival of the fittest,' to describe the 'struggle for life' in which all living beings participate (Darwin, 1979 [1859], 66-74). Of course, for Levinas, the *conatus essendi* invariably comes to embody those attributes he associates with the Hitlerian conception of 'Man' and thus the subtle nuances of the Darwinian, Spinozist and Heideggerian designations are often lost on him. Once again, the 'presentiment and memory' of Nazism pervades Levinas' explication of these important themes.

and the 'non site' (*non-lieu*) of 'the force of an alterity in me' (*OBBE* 114), then the 'soul' is clearly the situation of strife. This is a situation from which there is apparently no reprieve, since the 'concern for salvation,' Levinas will claim, 'stems from the biological self' and 'the biological self cannot dispense with mythology and war [*le moi biologique ne puisse se passer de mythologie et de guerre*]' (*BW* 48; *EO* 75).

It appears, however, that the oneself is equally incapable of extricating itself from the belligerence within it, for it is the force of this turbulence that impels the subject to breach its concern for itself. The (r)eversion of the self (simultaneously the eversion of the self and its reversion to *esse*; namely the vacillation of the two in their simultaneity) is allergic, one must conclude. Is the 'allergy' symptomatic of 'egoisms which are at war with one another,' the war that is 'the deed or drama of essence's interest' (*OBBE* 4), not imported into the 'soul' from the arena of life; and does Levinas not unwittingly internalize this 'drama' and situate it at the heart of ethics? Indeed, in many ways this 'drama' (*drame*) replicates within the 'soul' (although the status of this 'within' is ambiguous), the strife that marks the 'space of conflict' (*Streitraum*) between 'earth' (*Erde*) and 'world' (*Welt*) in Heidegger's essay, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1936). Certainly, in 'essential striving,' earth and world, like conatus and creature, 'raise each other into the self-assertion of their natures' (Heidegger, 1996 [1936], 55). Lending support to such a seemingly implausible suggestion is Derrida's remark that '*Totality and Infinity* is a work of art and not a treatise.' An observation we might equally apply to the Levinasian oeuvre as a whole (Derrida, 1978, 312n.7). Both Levinas' 'work' (of which the creature is the expression) and Heidegger's artwork, occupy a place between worlds, since both are, broadly speaking, memorial and inaugural. Perhaps the optimism of *Totality and Infinity* is misguided, then, as the 'relation with the other as face' does not 'heal allergy,' after all, but merely masks its symptoms (*TI* 197). To be sure, the relationship with exteriority purports to 'bring to a halt' (*elle arrête*) the play of ontology (*OBBE* 101; *AE* 160), and it is this 'interruption of essence' which, according to Levinas, 'energizes the reduction [*réduction qu'alimente de son énergie l'interruption (éthique) de l'essence*]' (*OBBE* 44; *AE* 76), permitting the subject in its susception to present itself to reflection. However, I would contend that it is the interruption *and* the restitution of essence that 'energizes' (or 'magnetizes' (*magnétisent*) (*TI* 26; *Tel* 11)) the field of ethics. One never quite sobers up, therefore, a point Levinas concedes in later works where he acknowledges that the sobriety appurtenant to diacony is processual rather than inveterate (*PA* 179).

The creature and the miscreant must learn to coexist, to co-habit and share the place they occupy, albeit a place sequestered through usurpation (to be sure an uneasy alliance and a difficult freedom to oversee), and to do this they must be instructed, such instruction requiring a deeper phenomenological explication (and excavation) of the theme of ‘teaching’ (*enseignement*) than Levinas was able to provide. As the conversion to creaturality is never complete, one must learn to ‘dwell’ in the interspace between the twin poles that apportion the space of oneself, poles between which something like the *Ichpol* defended by Husserl remains operative. This interspace is at once an interval, and one must try to adjust to the contra-natural rhythms of its puerperium, the time between the labour of supererogatory acts and the reversion to the self in its enjoyment. Regulation by no means entails the suspension of ‘restlessness,’ but merely its proper management, I would insist. After all, the exhausted ‘nurse’ is a liability, and the profligate host, inhospitable.

If, as Levinas avers, in ‘Desire there is no sinking one’s teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before one’ (*TI* 117; translation modified), Desire being, as it were, edentate. If, indeed, a face is the ‘flesh become word’ (*OBBE* 94), then one will have to re-educate one’s palate to ensure that one’s appetites do not become, so to speak, omophagic. One will be required to practice brinkmanship on the cusp of one’s desire. Desire, to practice a peculiar ἐποχή of sorts, to hold back one’s breath (as the trope of the pulmonary would have it (*OBBE* 180)), and to engage in a form of ethical asana to guard against the conative drives that threaten to destabilize the ‘soul’ and thwart its ‘destiny’ (*VO* 113). It is this ‘relaxation of virility without cowardice’ that Levinas wishes to convey with the notion of an-archic passivity (*OBBE* 185). He perhaps underestimates the complexity of this endeavour, however, and provides the aspirant with little or no indication of how she should manage the turmoil that ‘rends her soul’ (*OBBE* 182), nor, furthermore, of what a phenomenological disquisition of such ‘practices’ might reveal about the subjects who implement them and the optative of living a balanced life.

Balance is invariably an accomplishment of sorts, whose pursuit (and phenomenological exhibition) appears to complicate Levinas’ twofold division of life into the ‘categories’ (or, let us say, ‘regions’) of interest and dis-interest: the adventure of ethics cannot be schematized in this way. Perhaps the discipline of philosophy, as ‘the wisdom of love at the service of love’ (*OBBE* 162), may be called upon to cultivate such balance. As Pierre Hadot confers:

There is an equilibrium – almost impossible to achieve – between the inner peace brought about by wisdom, and the passions to which the sight of the

injustices, sufferings, and misery of mankind cannot help but give rise. Wisdom, however, consists in precisely such an equilibrium, and inner peace is indispensable for efficacious action (Hadot, 1995, 274).

How I cope with the ‘discovery of corpses beside me and my horror of existing by assassination’ (*PU* 100), should be as much the concern of proto-ethics as the post-traumatic stress endured by military service personnel ought to be of concern to the army that dispatches them into combat (and the comparison is not without poignancy, I feel). To be sure, the world, as Catherine Chaliel rightly notes, is in ‘need of reparation’ (Chaliel, 1998, 295). But ought this ‘reparation’ of the world, this *Tikkunshel ha-olam*, not also to extend to the rift within the ‘soul,’ a soul *in which*, contra Husserl, the world might not ‘float,’ but *by which*, according to Levinas, it is nonetheless upheld. How the  $\psi\bar{\upsilon}\chi\acute{\eta}$  *bears up* under the weight of its ‘crushing charge’ (*charge écrasante*) (*OBBE* 122; *AE* 194) is unclear, for the  $\psi\bar{\upsilon}\chi\acute{\eta}$ , apropos of Levinas, is anything but ursine, constituted, as it is, by its vulnerability (*vulnérabilité*).

## § 22. Motivation

Throughout his career, but notably during its later phases, Husserl had recourse to consider the extent to which intentional activity is motivated by the drive (*Trieb*) for satisfaction. The ‘Ego’ strives to achieve increasing unity in its experience of the world (a goal reflected in the *nisus* to fulfil empty intentions and extend the horizontal limits of constitution) and this ‘interest’ or ‘hunger’ animates every level of intentional life. If, as Husserl suggests at the close of the third of his *Cartesian Meditations*, consciousness admits of a ‘founding by levels’ (*eine Fundierung in Stufen*) (*CM* §29 [99]), each level in turn being a concatenation or shifting system of intentionalities, then the most rudimentary form of activity that may be ascribed to the Ego is ‘drive,’ and the most rudimentary forms of intentional operation, those of ‘drive-intentionality’ (*Triebintentionalität*) and ‘instinct intentionality’ (*Instinktintentionalität*).<sup>6</sup> Constitution is predetermined instinctively. The ego inherits impulses, one might say, it did not institute, impulses whose point of origination exceed the bounds of recuperation and cannot be retrieved by memory. Such animation (*Beseelung*) by ‘instinct’ disturbs Levinas, of course, but it also adverts to the fact that intentional life is constituted from the outside. For, as we have seen, one’s response to the appeal of the other person cannot be converted into a ‘natural

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<sup>6</sup> On the importance of the notion of ‘drive’ in Husserl, see, for example: A.D. Smith, *Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations* (Smith, 2003, 149-154).



tendency' (*une tendance naturelle*) (OBBE 53; AE 90) since it is *inspired* 'ethically' and ethics is *unnatural*. However, the phenomena of 'election' and inspiration,' structurally basic to the argumentation of *Otherwise than Being*, once again demonstrate that a form of phenomenological heritability is central to Levinas' project, which, while not strictly biological (the Husserlian designation of 'instinct' and 'drive,' let us stress, is *transcendental and phenomenological*), is generative in determination.

Levinas will reduce the 'drive' Husserl situates at the origin of consciousness and deduce behind it an ethical motivation. The Other is implicated at the source of the 'I,' intricate to its very emergence and hypostatisation (and let us recall that the Hebrew word for face (*panim*) is cognate with that for fountain or source). In the 'work' of passive synthesis lies a 'clue' to the hetero-affectivity of the subject. Husserl himself will even go so far as to suggest that it is 'drive' which, as Arthur Smith observes, 'pushes forward one present into the next in that flowing life which a conscious monad *enjoys*.' At base then, 'conscious life is the absolute flow which temporises itself in a constant striving' (Smith, 2003, 156; emphasis added). Husserl articulates the relation between the absolute flow of time and its constitution thus, broaching the following question:

May or must we not, presuppose a universal instinctive intentionality which unitarily constitutes every primal present as standing temporalization and which presses on from present to present in such a way that all content is content of the fulfilment of these drives and is intended prior to its achievement? (Husserl, 1973, 595)

Prior to the awakening of consciousness to its contents, there exists, then, a pre-reflective mode of intentional activity which is operative at the heart of the pre-egoic flow of time. Along with this pre-egoic flow of flows, Husserl will therefore posit an *Instinktintentionalität* to account for the fact that, as he puts in his lectures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1905), 'consciousness constitutes its own unity' (PIT §39 [80]).

Despite being affected from outside its recuperable fringes by an originary sensation or *Ur-impression* (an *Ur-impression* that is not the sedimented by-product of a previous activity), the 'absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness' (PIT §34 [73]) to which Husserl reduces the living present, remains, according to Levinas,

a matrix of intentional activity under the governance of constitutional law(s). In Husserl, he proffers, 'the time structure of sensibility is *the time of the recuperable*' (*OBBE* 34). As Husserl avers, 'the constituting and the constituted coincide' (*PIT* §39 [83]). Now, although Husserl will maintain that consciousness is the 'field' where phenomena (φαινόμενα) appear, their very appearance being regulated by the spontaneous operation of consciousness, and that the screen of the present is extended (one might say *distended* since the Ego, in its edacity, enjoys its past like the memory of a good meal) through retentive activity so as to accommodate, by way of modification, the fading impressions of each passing moment of duration, he will nonetheless concede that the 'primal impression is the absolute beginning of this production.' Such an admission would seem to deprive consciousness of its position of primacy, since 'consciousness is nothing without impression,' Husserl continues (*PIT*, Appendix I [100]). However, while the *Ur-impression* is not itself produced by consciousness but arises through 'genesis spontanea' (it has, Husserl confesses, 'no seed,' and is thus quite unlike the 'paternity' in which the filiation of 'ethics' begins, being a veritable 'primal creation' (*PIT*, Appendix I, [100])), consciousness *strives* to recover itself beyond the break in its recollective ability and to overcome the restrictions imposed upon it by its foreign generation.

In the midst of the passivity of consciousness, Levinas will contend, Husserl will attribute to 'drive' a unifying and teleological function. This is a function Levinas seeks to expedite from his account of the responsible subject, rendering the subject, as we have seen, radically passive. The 'prehistory of the ego' (*OBBE* 117), to which Husserl defers through this appeal to the operations of *Instiktintentionalität*, *Treibintentionalität* and *UrStreben*, ultimately gestures, Levinas believes, to the 'creation' of the subject on the hither side of the present. The living present is decussated by the 'trace' of one who has passed by into immemoriality, yet the trace left in the present *points beyond itself* to an un-representable past from whence the subject is called forth.<sup>7</sup> Hence, in the curious doubling of intentionality Husserl discerns in the flow of absolute consciousness (whereby time constituting consciousness constitutes itself in the midst of the fluxion of its flow (*PIT* §39 [83])), Levinas will discover the original diachrony of time.

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<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty expresses a similar point in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Writing of sensible experience he states: 'hence reflection does not itself grasp its full significance unless it refers to the unreflective fund of experience which it presupposes, upon which it draws, and which constitutes for it a kind of original past, a past which has never been a present (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 242; emphasis added).

The withdrawal of the 'Other,' qua 'trace,' cannot be retrieved for and by consciousness through a modification of presence, but the *break* in presence, marked by the disturbance of the present and the interruption of the 'I,' an interruption which, according to Derrida, is never 'pure,' falling always under the logic of 'ab-solute de-struction,' since unlike a 'cut' (*coupure*), it cannot be sutured to seal the wound it inflicts upon consciousness (Derrida, 1980, 29), permits Levinas to bring to light the 'Being of the creature' (WO 6). A creature to be understood, in non-theological terms, as *composed of responsibility* (a claim still to be substantiated), comparable to the way that consciousness, apropos of Husserl, is stratified by layers and nexus of intentional activity.

Where the Husserlian Ego augments itself with its habitualities, the Levinasian subject ages and is encumbered with itself. At the time of creation, Levinas insists, 'there is no subject to assume the creative act' (LP 114). The subject is *generated by* the Other. To be sure, we have questioned the saliency of this proposal and discovered susceptibility to be casuistic in its immediacy. Levinas' account of susception draws upon an intuitionism that is never made thematic as such, despite being announced elliptically under the heading of 'teaching' (*enseignement*). The 'creature' may be *impressible*, but this does not preclude it from yielding only to the materiality of the human 'face.' Yet, the 'event' (*événement*) of creaturalty (*la créaturalité*) to which Levinas reduces the 'absolute subjectivity' set forth by Husserl in his lectures on time-consciousness (PIT §36 [75]), allows Levinas to modify the Husserlian determination of consciousness as a pre-egoic subjection to the flow of time, and deduce from this proto-actional subjection the matrix (*matrice*) of susceptibility he believes substructures all positional activity. Thus Levinas remarks: 'the oneself is a creature, but an orphan by birth or an atheist no doubt ignorant of its Creator, for if it knew it, it would again be taking up its commencement' (OBBE 105).

Although the 'oneself' Levinas presents throughout the course of his writings is not, as we have seen, altogether 'ignorant' of its 'creator,' the situation Levinas highlights here is crucial to the plot of proto-ethics he outlines, and further clarifies the importance of the theme of 'recurrence' (*réurrence*) in his later work. For 'subjectivity is structured as 'the Other in the same' (OBBE 25), which means that the oneself *begins* (or commences) in the passivity of exposure. One is oneself 'through the others,' Levinas advises (OBBE 112). Adapting the motif of 'reverberation' so prevalent in Husserl's lectures on time consciousness (for example, each 'now point' stands before one, Husserl suggests, 'as the sound of a violin string that has been struck' (PIT §31 [61])), Levinas likens the an-archy of subjectivity to the 'echo of a

sound that would precede the resonance of this sound' (OBBE 111). The subject recurs (late to itself) across the 'dead time' (*le temps mort*), or 'meanwhile' (*l'entre-temps*), of the interval that separates it from itself. This *entre-temps* marks the moment of its interruption from the outside, and is the place 'where' the 'trace' of the Other disturbs the present.

The subject recurs as 'accused' and 'assigned' to itself before it is/was in a position to freely posit itself as such. It is now the subject (rather than the Other) who is an 'orphan' (OBBE 105) and a 'stranger' to itself (OBBE 92) because it has been driven from the site of its complacency by the Other (Levinas discovers in Husserl's *UrStreben*, the law of heteronomous generation, what he will term a 'will in my will' (TI 236)). But such experience of what is strange (*Fremderfahrung*) is fraught with ambiguity, for that which is strange in me is both that I am a stranger to myself and that I am estranged from myself. In both instances this estrangement may or may not be produced by the other person, and one may have to look to other transversals of the 'face' (the third, the *il y a*, the element) to account for its incidence. The primal sensation which impresses itself upon consciousness is ethically inspired, Levinas argues, and Husserl's *Ur-impression* reconfigured as the *Sur-impression* of the face animating the subject from within (OBBE 70). This face, let us emphasize once again, need not be feathery, nor the Other biddable, to solicit my regard, since I arise, qua creature, at its behest and upon the basis of its interpellation.

The 'trace' of an immemorial past is intercalated between the ego and its self, fissuring the auto-identification of the 'I' and dephasing it. The 'ultimate secret of the incarnation of the subject [*l'ultime secret de l'incarnation du sujet*]' (OBBE 111; AE 175) is revealed in and by the lapse of time between the subject being affected by the *Sur-impression* of the face (which engenders the present in which its trace is left) and the present represented (or retained) by the subject, as a modification of the primal impression that produces it. For Levinas then, the *Sur-impression* of the face remains 'non-modified [*non modifiée*]' (OBBE 33; AE 58) because the 'past' from whence it issues is not thematizable, exceeding, as it does, the grasp of consciousness. However, as Derrida makes clear in *Of Grammatology*, 'in the original temporalization and the movement of relationship with the outside, as Husserl actually described them, non-presentation or de-presentation is as originary as presentation.' That is why, Derrida continues 'a thought of the trace can no more break with a transcendental phenomenology than be reduced to it' (Derrida, 1974, 62).

To further elucidate the diachronic structure of sensibility, Levinas deploys the figures of respiration and fibrillation. These tropes reinforce the fact that, according to Levinas, the ‘strange sort of nature [*la nature d'étrange sorte*]' (OBBE 109; AE 172) definitive of subjectivity is contra-natural and supra-conative. The ‘dead time’ that separates ‘inspiration and expiration’ and interrupts ‘the diastole and systole of the heart beating dully against the walls of one’s skin’ (OBBE 109), disturbs the body’s ‘natural’ rhythms like a malady or ‘delirium’ (OBBE 101) which, as the popular saying goes, puts one ‘out of sorts’ with oneself. Between heartbeats, ‘I’ am *animated* by the Other; between breaths, ‘I’ am *inspired* by the Other. This recurrence, then, is that *by which* one is incarnate. The subject is a cardio-pulmonary space opened up and exposed to others. Levinas himself confirms that ‘the subject could be a *lung* at the bottom of its substance’ (OBBE 180), and, similarly, that the ‘subject becomes a *heart*’ in its being-for-the-other, a proposition which, in his more kabbalistic moments, Levinas deems compatible with the idea that ‘God’ acts through the subject on these occasions (GP 144). As such, Levinas concludes, the subject is ‘wholly a supporting [*toute entière un supporter*]' (OBBE 180; AE 276). In the quotidian activity of breathing Levinas locates the extraordinary ‘nobility’ of a ‘pure supporting’ (GP 140) worthy of provoking the ‘wonder’ (*étonnement*) in which the enterprise of philosophy begins. A *Grundbestimmung* to rival ‘shame’ as the attunement in which ethics, qua *philosophia prôtê* (πρώτη φιλοσοφία), opens, a trauma (τραῦμα) rather than thauma (θαῦμα), however, as Levinas is quick to caution (PA 177, OBBE 181), for ethics is quite distinct from the mirabilia of magic. Indeed, ‘purely thaumaturgical miracles’ are ‘not miraculous enough,’ Levinas will opine (BVI 211n.12), and the Other must be protected against involution, so inviolable is the face (*vultus*) that its sanctity must be safeguarded against that which would defile it.

The human *Sonderstellung* is thus not so much a ‘place’ (how could it be when the subject is devastated of its site) as a role, and it is by this role that the self is designated. Henceforth, one must construe the ‘soul’ not as ψυχὴ λόγος, or a silent discourse with itself, but as *contactual*: the very hypostasization of sensibility, susceptibility itself. *Pace* Aristotle, the soul is not, therefore, merely the actuality of the body, but what I would term its *contactuality*.<sup>8</sup> From one’s first breath to one’s last and arguably beyond, for the dimension of ethics is undeniably generative (‘the

<sup>8</sup> See Aristotle *De Anima*, 413a (Aristotle, 1986, 158). Famously, of course, Aristotle will claim that ‘the eye is the matter of sight, so that when sight leaves it it is no longer an eye’ (*De Anima*, 413a). The soul is the actuality (*entelechia*) of the body, therefore, since it is, as it were, sight hypostasized.



tomb is not a refuge,' Levinas will maintain, since one's 'debt' to others outlives one (BPW 190n.25)), one is *situated* in relation to others. It is in this sense, then, that 'spirit' (purged, or so Levinas will claim, of its mythological connotations) is 'the longest breath there is [*souffle le plus long qui soit*]' (OBBE 182; AE 278), the depth of the soul itself. Space and time are the a priori (posteriorly) forms of 'respiration,' one might say, were one to follow Levinas in his suggestion here. But is Levinas' confidence in the deposition of *essance* (the deployment of essence) justified? And is his designation of Being as 'evil' warranted (TO 51)? Being is evil, Levinas will urge, because like the *apeiron* (ἄπειρον), it is unbounded. The 'law of evil' is the 'law of being,' Levinas insists (POM 175), because the reign of conation is incessant. Is not to depict Being thus an oversimplification?<sup>9</sup>

One might say that Levinas' 'work' is riven by a series of polarizations that structure the field of proto-ethics in decisive ways.<sup>10</sup> The displacement of the ego into *me voici* is achieved, it seems, without remainder; the 'purity' of the production reported here being untainted by the spoils of conation (although the *il y a* haunts the fold of face and form, it does not, according to Levinas, complicate their disunity, an admission not a little dubious since the element, I would contend, is the format of the face and extends, as Levinas himself suggests, into the *il y a* (TI 142)). Perhaps Levinas is too clinical in his treatment of conation, too much the anatomist held enthralled by the workings of the 'lungs,' the 'heart,' and the 'stomach,' to accord the subject much concern in her malaise. Conation is denounced unequivocally by Levinas without due attention being paid to the ego personality in and through whom such striving is unleashed. For with the haemorrhaging of the self is there anyone left to suffer the Other; and have 'I' not been usurped by the 'total Organ' of the *corps éthique*? Levinas, no doubt under the influence of Husserl, presumes the 'I' (the ego wrenched from its hypostasis by the Other) to be regnant in its sphere of oneness, without questioning the self-evidences upon which this supposition is based.

<sup>9</sup> As Didier Franck contends, 'this interpretation of Being [Being as evil], while supporting all of Levinas's work, is never justified.' Indeed, with Franck one may well wonder whether it might be possible to 'accede to the *there is* otherwise than through horror,' the affect through which, according to Levinas, one is exposed to the indeterminacy of the *il y a* (Franck, 2000, 15).

<sup>10</sup> In what follows, John Milbank's remarks are instructive in this regard, although one need not subscribe fully to the latter's somewhat depreciatory caricature of Levinas' thought. Milbank suggests that: 'Levinas in fact produces a bizarre inverted egoism, which conserves a mode of Cartesian dualism, and indeed perhaps accentuates it into a mode of manicheanism. Although it is now the other I and not I myself which is the foundation of understanding, a gulf is fixed upon its basis between the *il y a* of empty meaningless existence that cannot be redeemed, and which always engenders horror on the one hand, and the ethical cosmos which establishes "the right" of the subject in the face of this horror, on the other. On the ethical plane, the result is a reactive ethics which falsely identifies self-obliviation with the final good, and requires the good to be predatory upon pre-existing suffering (Milbank, 2001, 342).

Again, had Levinas not hurried the transition between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood,’ and had he scrutinized the process of (ethical) maturation more closely, he may have found the phenomenon of ‘adolescence’ to be instructive in this regard. For the conative drives are not so easily managed and certainly do not always support the ego in its predation. The ego, to invert the Husserlian formulation, may be held sway by its drives, drives which are arguably not its ‘own,’ or its ownmost, but which threaten the economy of the  $\psi\bar{\upsilon}\chi\acute{\nu}$ , and pulsate, more often than not, according to the rhythms of destruction, rather than to those of enjoyment (a *Destruktion* of the spirit quite distinct from that enterprise announced by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (BT §6 [19-27])). Levinas does not recognise that the conatus in ‘me’ is also the ‘beast’ in me (although it need not be the *blonde Bestie* in me), and that the ‘wild barbarian’ character of alterity (TRA 347) threatens the tenure of the self from within *and* from without (although these topoi are, of course, confounded by Levinas). The locus of the ‘strange’ in me cannot be identified exclusively with my being ‘animated’ by the other person. For, not only am I a stranger to myself (the basis, perhaps, for the analogization commended by Husserl), but I may, to employ the Levinasian figure, be ‘held hostage’ by (my) drives, in which case one may be permitted to conclude that ‘it’ drives me – *comme il pleut, comme il fait chaud, comme il y a* – since ‘I’ do not commandeer ‘my’ drives.

The logic of reflexivity, then, defines conation. The conatus imperils *itself*. The marauder terrorizes *itself*. The gourmand consumes *itself*. The other person may awaken me (traumatically) from my acquiescence and challenge my satiety, however, might I not be ‘hunted down in my home’ (OBBE 92) by the other that I am to myself? Might the ‘other in me’ not betoken that in me which puts my very perseverance in being at risk? Many of the habitualities the ego acquires do not promote its growth or enhance the standing of its *Kernwelt* but instead lead to its degeneration. To be sure, as Levinas notes, the en-joinment to oneself, constitutive of *jouissance*, includes deficient forms of self-experience as well as those more typically associated with enjoyment. However, the domicile Levinas presents, the home from which ‘I’ am ejected by the other person, preserves its domesticity in his account despite the Other’s ingressions into the sanctity of my ‘inwardness.’ What if, we may ask, to be at-home-with-oneself (*être chez soi*) is to be at war with oneself; what if the ‘feminine’ presence that welcomes one there, where the ‘there’ in question is the ‘*Da*’ that is put into question by the Other, is less than cordial, and Εστία, the goddess of the hearth (a hearth where according to Heraclitus even the gods ‘dwell,’ and in Heidegger’s estimation of the latter’s saying, the ‘unfamiliar’ resides (Heidegger,

1996 [1947]) perhaps, one might add, under the guise of ilyaity) were at once Εἰς, the goddess of strife, or the tutelary goddess Αθηνᾶ, a deeply ambiguous presence being both the goddess of wisdom and war. Levinas would, of course, resist such a reading, by insisting that 'the feminine will never take on the aspect of the Divine' since 'the dimension of intimacy,' rather than 'the dimension of loftiness,' is 'opened up by woman' (JF 37).

For all its subsequent trauma, the domestic scene Levinas describes is far too peaceable a lodging to accommodate the 'conatus' whose struggle for self-aggrandizement the other person purportedly interrupts. Perhaps his horror at the *il y a* prohibited Levinas from exploring the 'basement' of his domicile, a 'site,' according to the schema of Freudian topography, from which unconscious drives and urges arise. Is it any wonder, then, that in the 'home,' whose ontological accomplishment Levinas treats, the adolescent is most often at home (*chez soi*) in the basement (*le sous-sol*) and secure in the reclusion it provides.

Pleasure, as Levinas observes in *De l'évasion*, may exist 'wholly in the enlargement of its own amplitude,' thriving upon its own 'swooning' (OE 61), but conation, which arguably feeds upon itself, being what one might call, endophagous, invariably consumes its 'host' such that, once again, it would be incorrect to identify the ego personality too forcibly with the *conatus essendi*, as Levinas is wont to do. The existent, one might say, irrespective of the logic of the *antérieure postérieurement* (TI 170; Tel 184), issues from a *broken home*. One inhabits ruins, not palatial quarters. The 'I' no more coincides with the conatus than the ethically inspired subject coincides with itself. Thus, the ego fulfilling itself intentionally, which, as Husserl intimates, is 'the performer of all validities' (Crisis §50), is apt to discover that its performance is impaired by unruly drives, drives which refuse to be checked by higher order 'mental' activity, rendering them a threat to the prospects of the 'I.' If the 'face' is to heal allergy (TI 197), then must the 'master' not cure the 'student' of the disease that reigns within her? How is this θεραπεῖα to be administered and at what cost to proto-ethical prudence? These are questions Levinas fails to entertain, although he will concede that 'the ego may be called in the name of unlimited responsibility to concern itself about itself as well' (TOT 50; emphasis added), or, as he puts it in *Otherwise than Being*, responsibility 'poses problems, if one is *not* to abandon oneself to violence' (OBBE 193n.33; emphasis added). Again, quite how this care for self alters the sense (*sens*) of proto-ethics remains unclear, as do the circumstances under which one is to moderate the immoderacy of one's responsibility in the interest of self-interest. Levinas does not elaborate further on

these points. One can say, however, that the (pre)original primacy granted the 'Other' in Levinas' thinking is not breached by this concern for self. At best we may be permitted to speak of a qualified asymmetry in this regard.

Ricoeur acknowledges this aporia in Levinas' work and supplements, what he considers to be the limitations of the latter's preoccupation with 'externality,' with an insistence upon the 'profound unity of self-attestation *and* of injunction coming from the Other' (Ricoeur, 1992, 354-355; translation altered). The subject is one who is enjoined to be for others and to esteem itself as the bearer of this mandate. Echoing Ricoeur's sentiments, Bernet defines ethical conscience as 'an immediate sensitivity *both* for the call which comes from the other *and* for myself as the one who cannot escape from this call (Bernet, 1996, 172). Now, despite Levinas' concession that a modicum of self-love may be requisite if 'I' am to sustain my responsibility for others ('My lot is important,' he intimates (*OBBE* 161)), my duties are weighted incontrovertibly in the Other's favour. As the other *in* the same, Levinas will urge, subjectivity 'is the putting into question of *all* affirmation for-oneself' (*OBBE* 111; emphasis added). Moreover, the relationship with the Other 'empties me of myself' such that 'I no longer have the right to keep anything for myself' (*MS* 52). And the justification for this extreme view of ethical life is, apropos of Levinas, that 'sacrifice is the norm and the criterion of the approach' to the face (*EP* 76).

### § 23. *Self acclaim*

The policy of abasement we have found to be central to Levinas' presentation of responsibility does not accord well with conceptions of the 'good' life that emphasize communality, or a greater degree of reciprocity between what, in Levinas' estimation, are competing egoisms. For example, the Aristotelian notion that 'the good man should be a lover of self' since 'he will both himself profit by doing noble acts and will benefit his fellows' (Aristotle, 1925, 1169a8), is diametrically opposed to the kind of 'consummation' for the other in terms of which Levinas understands ethics (*OBBE* 50), even if Levinas' ethic *of* ethics is doubly genitive, being both the prototype and exemplum for what it accomplishes. But the εὐδαίμων life lauded by Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, the life culminating in εὐδαιμονία, is one that has not abrogated egoism, Levinas will contend, and thus persists on its imperious way, a way in pursuit of the πρῶται ἀρχαί. Of course, responsibility itself has no end since it is asymptotic, *en ladavar soph*, or 'never ending' (*TP* 85), and the

teleological nîsus toward accomplishment is extinguished in the properly ethical 'Desire' for the Other. Before the face, Levinas thus argues, 'any concern that the ego would have for its existence and its destiny' is rendered 'senseless' (*insensé*) (*OBBE* 128; *AE* 204). Nothing is 'more comical', he concludes, than 'the concern that a being has for an existence it could not save from destruction' (*OBBE* 129).

Yet the self esteem which Aristotle, Ricoeur and Bernet, among others, situate at the heart of ethics, is anything but comedic, and we may concur with Bloechl that ethics entails both the limitation and management of a desire beyond being (the Desire for the 'Other') with a desire for self worth (Bloechl, 2000a, 149). At the level of proto-ethics Levinas will not sanction such regulation because the oneself, he asserts, is immediately susceptible to  $\chi$ for the face of the other person. The oneself does not retain the time for deliberation (it ages, we recall, it cannot 'catch its breath' (*OBBE* 153)) but acts, dare we say, instinctively, such 'instincts' being honed through 'education' – although Levinas will insist contra-naturally – and laid down as its sedimentum, in accordance with the heteronomy of the face. As we have seen, however, the subject (formed in passivity), precisely as impressible, has been taught to respond to the face *qua* face, whether this be by the grace of God (*grace à-Dieu*), or thanks to a certain 'liturgy of study' into which it is initiated generatively. The two are not, we note, incommensurable. To be sure, the oneself is undeniably exposed. However, the 'conversion' of this openness into the extreme form of ethical portage defended by Levinas (such that my responsibility no longer admits of 'limit or measure' (*OBBE* 47)) is not so readily justified. For Levinas appears to deprive the individual moral agent of choice in the matter and he does so because he believes the subject to be everted by the 'Good' in the encounter with the face. One is consumed, or cored out, by the 'Good.' It is therefore the 'Good' that acts in 'me' and not 'I' who act on its behalf. Passivity is literally ab-solute, one might say. Indeed, so much so, that I am absolved of my identity: an empty space.

The displacement of the ego into the 'creature' is so complete that Levinas will even liken it to 'the consuming of a holocaust' (*GP* 143), an illusion not without its obvious pathos. Sensibility, apropos of Levinas, is an 'unlimited undergoing,' then, and not 'the generosity of offering oneself' (*OBBE* 75), since the *corps éthique*, unlike the *Leib* in which the 'I' holds sway, is animated by the Other, supplanting the ego from its position of primacy and ousting it from its origin. In its 'historizing' (*Geschehen*) Dasein may well be bestrewn or 'stretched along.' As care, 'Dasein is the 'between' that links the phenomena of birth and death, Heidegger suggests: Being-in-the-world is at once a project unto death and a Being-towards-the-beginning



(BT §72 [375]). The subject Levinas deduces, however, is born into the 'beginninglessness of an anarchy and in the endlessness of obligation' (*OBBE* 140). Furthermore, the obligation with which the subject is encharged augments itself incessantly the more the subject heeds the Other's call (*OBBE* 93). Infinity comes to pass as the concrescence of responsibility, responsibility which grows steadily relative to its accomplishment.

The infinity determinative of responsibility does not denote its 'actual immensity' though, or so Levinas will confirm (*TI* 244), because the *Zwischen* of ethical negotiations is a non-geometric space that does not proffer itself to measurement. Contra Jeremy Bentham, responsibility cannot be gauged by calculus, nor, however, do the demands its exercise make upon one lenify proportionate to one's capacity to bear them: no principle of utility legislates its extent. The 'march' (*la marche*) of responsibility is both interminable and unforgiving in its severity, since 'culpability augments with saintliness' (*TDIT* 103). Dasein in Heidegger may not be hungry, as Levinas opines (*TI* 134), but *me voici*, one might argue, is never satisfied. Like the possibility of the impossibility of existence, the anticipation of which, according to Heidegger, becomes 'greater and greater,' knowing 'no measure at all' (*BT* §53 [262]), the compass of what one might 'accomplish' for others is continually offset against the greater 'debt' of what one cannot 'achieve' (due to the constraints of singularity, resources, localization, awareness, etc.). In Levinas, then, to adapt what Heidegger says of the 'Open' (*das Offene*) in his essay, 'Conversation on a Country Path,' the 'horizon' of what one might possibly be/do for others is 'but the side facing us of an Open that surrounds us' (Heidegger, 1966, 64); an openness that for Heidegger is precisely 'impossible' for representational thinking (the 'Open' englobes the various *Abschattungen* that concatenate to form objects for consciousness, housing the manifold of pre-objective appearance(s)).

Levinas' use of hyperbole, and arguably hyperbole is the very en-ergy of the Levinasian corpus (the subject divests itself of its substance, he will advert, 'even to the mucous membrane of the lungs, continually splitting up' (*OBBE* 107)), which, we have noted, he deploys repeatedly throughout his work, does not mitigate against the austerity of his position here and we may wonder whether, in the midst of the phlegmasia and expectoration to which he alludes, there is a place for the science of hygienics in Levinas' thought.<sup>11</sup> Might one not be called, as Nietzsche will have us

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<sup>11</sup> As Levinas argues in *Of God Who Comes To Mind*, 'exasperation' is 'a method of philosophy' (*QA* 89). Certainly such an admission accords well with Levinas' own thought and the punishing regime to

believe of Goethe, to keep oneself 'in check' and have 'reverence' for oneself (Nietzsche, 1990, 114)? Must the individual be sacrificed (reduced to cinders) in the encounter with the face (*GP* 143)? Am 'I,' as Levinas suggests, never finished with 'emptying myself of myself' (*GP* 144)? Need (proto)ethics entail such losses?

To some extent Levinas' appraisal of proto-ethical obligation is accurate, and his descriptions are germane. Taking the notion of 'maternity,' for example, as a figure for the 'immensity' of responsibility is a deft move on Levinas' part. The ambit of maternal love (a phenomenon not restricted to the human species) is indeed broad. (Let us be clear, the proto-ethical translation of the 'empirical' draws upon an idealized depiction of motherhood, deemed by Levinas to be both 'typical' and 'normative.' Furthermore, this reflects the conservatism of the gender politic he inherits from Mitnagdic culture.) A mother's love for his/her child is incalculable: as a trope maternity is non-gender specific, Levinas assures us. One cannot tabulate its depth or assign it, so Levinas will have us believe, a worldly valence as it transcends quantification. Ethical portage is likewise boundless, Levinas will argue, because it too exceeds the measure of the 'world.' Yet 'parents' do not love all children with equal force (they are devoted to their *own* first and foremost), and if the trope of maternity is to survive its ethical configuration then must it not also account for the difference and divergency that attends the 'physiognomies' from which, among other places, the face signifies? Maternal love is one of the most (s)elective instantiations of love, and while the privacy of the *face-à-face* is certainly exclusive, the presence of the third party interrupts the intimacy of this family 'bond' (*lien*) like an unwelcome sibling (or the 'orphan' the childless couple did not adopt).<sup>12</sup> Of course, Levinas will maintain, the singularity of the face is the guarantor of its individuality (*TI* 245). But a face bereft of form is ultimately nondescript, providing one with no sense of whether the 'Desire' that 'consumes' one, or the love one 'bears' for the Other, is appropriate or proper to that individual.

It is the third party that regulates the form of my devotion to the Other (*Autrui*) and thus the horizon of the third party that delimits the field of proto-ethics. The quasi-familial *à-deux* of the face-to-face is something of a *ménage-à-trois*, then. However, as we have seen, the role accorded the third in Levinas is ambiguous, and

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which he submits it and to which it is submitted by the concrete situations whose proto-ethical importation he treats.

<sup>12</sup> As Stella Sandford has argued, and I believe her remarks here to be germane to the concept of maternity in Levinas' thought: 'each time that fecundity is said to overflow its purely biological signification, *the biological origin of the concept is nevertheless affirmed*' (Sandford, 2000, 69; emphasis added).

the 'law in the midst of proximity' (*OBBE* 159) instituted by the third is notoriously difficult to decipher (as if it were written, 'for the most part,' in an ancient dialect, perhaps even in square letters?). So much so, that apropos of Levinas one is unclear to what extent the demand for justice modifies the terms of my responsibility for the 'one' who draws near *en ce moment même*, even if this moment, distended generatively beyond its instantiation in the present, commits me to a future always already underway.

#### § 24. *Threat and limitation*

Reasoning in a decidedly rabbinical manner (akin to those Doctors of the Talmud he so admires), Levinas will propose that I 'myself' have always 'one responsibility more than the other,' since 'I am still responsible for his responsibility.' It thus follows, Levinas adds, that 'if he is responsible for my responsibility, I am still responsible for the responsibility that he has for my responsibility' (*TP* 85). The final onus of responsibility in this nexus of responsibility falls to me, therefore, because I must be *responsible for myself* and in so being I mollify the other's burden and relieve them (partly) of their ward of me. Although Levinas nowhere, to my mind at least, speaks directly of self-responsibility (no doubt due to the fact that responsibility is oriented toward the Other, and because this concern for 'self' differs markedly from the strain of 'personal responsibility' (*persönliche Verantwortung*) advocated by Husserl in 'the Crisis' (*Crisis* §7)) one must presume he means something of this sort when he writes, as we have seen, of one's responsibility 'manifesting itself by limiting itself' (*TOT* 50).

I take charge of myself in order that I might serve the 'Good' more effectively: self-responsibility is eutropic, one might say, directed principally toward the face of the Other who calls it forth in 'me.' I may thus be summoned to be a 'mother' to myself and to bear myself with care lest I present myself before the tribunal of the face ill prepared for the tasks with which it assigns me (however, such 'motherhood' should not be conflated with valetudinarianism or an obsession with one's own well being). Of course, this stipulation to care for oneself requires that *one readies oneself* for service, that *one assumes a position of preparedness* for diacony, stances taken in anticipation of (and yet in the wake of) the face that obligates one. Such stances, or postures, one might say (one's 'basic posture is the for-the-other' (*SaS* 158); in its 'basic posture' (*son port de soi*) the 'subject is expiation,' Levinas avers (*SOR* 186)), strengthen the 'constitution' of the ethical subject, as the ambulation in which the *Leib*

engages to flesh out its *Nahsphäre*, invariably, and unremarked by Husserl, fortifies the body upon which constitution depends, awarding new meaning to the sense that the philosopher might be περιπατητικός (and let us note, the Hebrew *halakh*, from which is derived the word Halakhah, meaning law or rule of conduct, also means *to walk*).

Needless to say, Levinas does not specify exactly how the excess of responsibility I bear for others ‘carries its own limit *in its excess*’ (ERDO 182; emphasis added), nor does he indicate in what ways one might manage the ‘trauma’ one suffers through exposure to the Other. He does, however, refer to the ‘incomparable strength’ of Jewish ritual, whose ‘antiquated gestures’ release a ‘mysterious energy’ which *prolongs and sustains* the ‘obedience to prescription’ such liturgical acts express (DJ 8). No doubt too, one might add, the aforementioned ritualized behaviour provides a liturgical forum or space for catharsis (κάθαρσις), and a discharge of tension from the service of daily life. Indeed, Levinas notes that together with the ‘study’ of the Torah (which is, he declares, ‘more important than liturgy,’ but which itself arguably involves strong elements of ritual (CR 51)) liturgical acts ‘support’ the universe and preserve its integrity (DF 9). Given that the ethical subject is a ‘pure support,’ then, must we not conclude that its capacity *qua* support (and hence the capaciousness of animatological space) is related directly to the sustenance the subject draws from ‘liturgy’ and ‘study,’ these ‘disciplines’ thus serving as the ‘staging’ or *mise-en-scène* for the ethical philosophy Levinas propounds. The sub-textual exchange between Levinas’ ‘philosophical’ and ‘confessional’ texts would appear to corroborate this proposal, as would Levinas’ promotion of an ontology of the book and his contention that one’s being *Zum-Buch-sein* is ‘irreducible for the human condition’ (BV xi).

Those of Levinas’ readers repelled by the dogmatism of institutionalised Religion and the self-evidences it so effortlessly grants itself will, if one is to take seriously Levinas’ endorsement of ‘liturgy,’ and its connection to ‘ethics,’ be required to adopt ‘practices’ to ensure that the haleness of the ψυχή (since every psyche, ethically inspired, is prone to ‘psychosis’ (GDT 188)) be preserved *in spite* of the persecution it undergoes. Arguably, the vision of the moral ‘life’ that Levinas distils is emboldened by the ‘performance’ of liturgy and the ‘discipline’ of study he defends in his Talmudic writings.<sup>13</sup> The ‘teaching’ Levinas imparts is inscribed in, and

<sup>13</sup> For example, one clearly ascertains the direction such a life *should* take in *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas states: ‘we find the agglomerations or dispersions of peoples in the deserts without manna of this earth. But each individual of these peoples is virtually a chosen one, called to leave in his

reiterated by, the ritualised gestures embodied in these practices, practices which have functioned generatively throughout the history of Judaism to disseminate the kinds of 'knowledge' Levinas conveys in his work. It is against the horizon of such socially mediated practices (the origins of which share many traits, and indeed a common heritage, with those cultic practices Levinas believes to be specific to 'pagan' forms of religiosity) that the symbolic order of the 'face,' and the authority it commandeers, arises and is enshrined as normative. It is in this sense, I suggest, that we should understand Levinas when he says that the 'way' that leads to ethical maturation 'draws us back to ritual discipline and self-education,' the 'greatness' of which 'lies in its daily regularity' (*RFA* 18). Of course, this way requires 'tough discipline [*dure discipline*]' (*MH* 227; *SDH* 317) and (a) sturdy constitution, just as, one might add, the 'existential way' of 'laying bare' the ontological meaning of the Being of Dasein, requires, according to Heidegger, '*unwavering discipline*' and focus (*BT* §65 [323]).

Levinas' vision of what he will call, the excellence of exteriority ('Height is heaven,' he advises, 'the kingdom of heaven is ethical' (*OBBE* 183)), orients comportment only insofar as the  $\sigma\chi\eta\mu\alpha$  he outlines is acknowledged by a subject as a directive for action. This in turn, as we have seen, depends upon the subject in question being 'susceptible' to the incursions of the face, and therefore responsive to its demands, in the ways Levinas asserts. But for those of us who have evaded the 'rule' (*Mekhilta*) of the *Amoraim* and loitered outside the yeshiva in the margins of Jewish history, the imperative force with which the face greets us will be correlative with our impressibility as students and regulated by the tutelage we have received.<sup>14</sup> Yet one's being impressible, while obviously a reference to one's being, so to speak, receptive (or as Bloechl aptly puts it, 'appealable' (Bloechl, 2000, 278)), might also indicate that one is gullible before the 'face' and that the moral 'teaching' Levinas prescribes is indeed a 'barter of the duped' (*un troc de dupe*) (*OBBE* 184; *AE* 282). Not all teachers are trustworthy, after all. And while, as we noted earlier, the subject *takes face in*, might one not argue equally that the subject is *taken in by the face*? Must one not trust the face in its frankness? Must one not *submit* to instruction (despite the rhetoric of susception to which Levinas subscribes), and thereby submit both to the figura of the face and to the figure of oneself with which the Other presents one? Must one not have a sense of  $\chi$ for oneself, qua 'creature,' which one then accepts as binding?

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turn, or without awaiting his turn, the concept of the ego, its extension in the people, to respond with responsibility: *me*, that is, *here I am for the others*' (*OBBE* 185)).

<sup>14</sup> The *Amoraim* are teachers of Talmud. See Levinas' glossary of Hebrew terms in *In The Time Of The Nations* (*ITN* xii).



It may be that the self-image in and by which I recognize myself, is abject, and that the 'evil Genius' described by Descartes, haunts the interstices of the εἶδος I accept as my own (energising the specular site of abjection). In which case 'I' am at a loss and quite literally desolate, but in an altogether less efficacious way than the *désolation* lauded by Levinas for its moral probity. And, if Visker is to be believed, the jurisdiction of the *il y a* may have to be broadened beyond that defined by Levinas to include that in me which alienates me from myself (Visker, 1999, 388). To be sure, self-image, whether this corresponds to one's condition qua 'creature' or 'conatus,' is fashioned through passivity. However, Levinas is less willing to acknowledge the 'traumatism' that accompanies self-attestation, than he is to credit the 'trauma' through which the creature is produced with near salvific qualities. Indeed, he will even liken the 'teacher-pupil relationship [*la relation de maître à élève*]' (Levinas' synonym for the face-to-face relation) to 'deliverance,' or a 'return from exile' (*MT* 86; *TM* 125), since the face, he believes, presents the self with the opportunity to surpass itself. Nevertheless, this deliverance (*délivrance*), which Levinas would, no doubt, see prefigured in Husserl ('we deliver ourselves from our footing' in the natural attitude, Husserl surmises, 'by universal epochē' (*CM* §15 [72])), requires one to accede to the notions that natural, conative life is something from which one needs delivering (natural life is fallen), and that in one's natural state one is (a) *conatus essendi* or *libido dominandi*.

The body dysmorphism of the anorexic, or the 'labour' of the teenage girl struggling with her 'form,' certainly do complicate what I take to be Levinas' general view that left to one's own devices the conatus in one will predominate and lead one to pursue a life of wanton self-gratification in the interest of self-preservation. On the contrary, human beings engage in many forms of behaviour that jeopardize this *nisus* toward self-preservation, and from which they may require liberating. *Dasein* may be bestrewn, but one's being, so to speak, *Streuung* out (on prescription drugs, perhaps) is surely a cause for concern, whether or not the palliative one seeks is to take the edge off the *apeiron* (ἀπείρων), famous, of course, for its lack of edges (οὐροί), or to attenuate the demands of a limitless responsibility (and as Heidegger reminds us, 'addiction and urge are possibilities rooted in the thrownness of *Dasein*' (*BT* §41 [196])). No doubt Levinas would deem such behaviour to be a variety of narcissism. He would be 'naïve' (and here Levinasian first philosophy remains naïve despite its an-archaeological (an-archic) pretensions) to think that 'exposure' to the face is sufficient to wrench one from the abject self-image to which one may have become accustomed, and accustomed, in many instances, through pathological and often

ritualized forms of behaviour (one thinks of the phenomena of self harm, scarification, bulimia nervosa, anorexia, alcohol and drug addiction, for example), behaviour altogether different from the 'ethical behaviour' (*le comportement éthique*) Levinas believes to characterize one's relations with the 'Metaphysical' (*TI* 78; *Tel* 76). The flight from  $\phi\hat{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$  was never going to be anything but traumatic for Levinas, yet in the final analysis the trauma of 'awakening' remains *productive* for him.

In 'drive' (*Trieb*), however, one witnesses a splitting of the Ego, which while not necessarily schizoid (although the 'creation' of the subject is schizogenic, i.e., formed by a fission or *dénucléation* of sorts) is indicative of a state of affairs somewhat more 'involved' than that itemized by Levinas under the thematic of conation. The space of the oneself is a space of conflict between fractious parties. The 'will in my will,' Levinas describes, is itself bifurcated, the torsion of a complex more pronounced than Levinas himself may have realized. Whether one trusts the 'face' that assigns one to oneself, or the 'faces' from whom one 'learns' to identify with an abject self-image (one thinks of the bully, for example, and as Levinas reminds us, 'in alterity we *can* find an enemy' (Hand, 1989, 294; emphasis added)), one must, as Levinas correctly argues, be pre-originarily susceptible to others. Yet self image is governed by what we might call emplotment, which again sets the 'face,' its recognition, and the  $\epsilon\hat{\iota}\delta\omicron\varsigma$  I accept as my own, against the horizon(s) of tertiality. One's identity may, as Levinas argues, 'endure *unto* the limit' (*OBBE* 196 n.20), but the  $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$  whose boundary prohibits the total conflagration of the self, or condones its sacrifice, is installed generatively and secured through heritability. The discernment of such a limit calls for a science of limits (which one might term a peratology) to guard against 'false teachers' (and let us not take this trope too literally) who may conspire to orchestrate one's demise, even if such teachers are, as it were, subhuman forces whose assault upon the self is anything but premeditated.

Like Dasein, who, in the form of conscience, carries 'the voice of the friend' along with it (*BT* §34 [163]), a voice that extricates Dasein from its dispersion in the 'They,' the subject, under the instruction of the 'teacher,' bears one within who dispossesses it of itself and in so doing individuates it as such.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in both cases, one may wonder whether the friend (teacher) is a foe, that is, one who may mislead. Certainly, for Levinas the  $\phi\hat{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in me is a foe to be conquered rather than appeased. Again then, if I am, in a manner of speaking, compelled as Heidegger suggests, to 'become what I am' (*BT* §31 [145]), because ultimately I *am* what I *am* to become,

<sup>15</sup> No doubt, for Levinas, the friend is the 'Master' or Talmudic 'Doctor.'

then what I am to become may well prove to be a threat to *me* and to the life of diacony I am called to lead.

Of course, the sacrifices demanded of 'me' by the Other are many, and while responsibility might entail the 'ultimate gift of dying for another' (NM 163), the situation of susception is such that the phenomenon of oblation it engenders, is multiform. Sacrifice, like 'truth,' is produced in 'several times' and in various places (TI 284), once again confirming what Levinas will term, 'the anarchy essential to multiplicity' (TI 294). The limitations imposed upon my responsibility by the third party oblige me to sacrifice commitments, abdicate relationships, and curtail correspondences. Each 'act' (which, as Levinas has made clear, is proto-actional since 'my' actions are animated 'ethically,' 'I' am created through them) in which I am implicated is expiatory because each 'act' prohibits and inhibits others. Derrida summarises this predicament thus:

As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, command or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others [...] But I am sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my obligations to the other others whom I know or don't know, the billions of my fellows (without mentioning the animals that are even more other others than my fellows), my fellows who are dying of starvation or sickness... every one being sacrificed to every one else in this land of Moriah that is our habitat every second of every day (Derrida, 1995, 68-69).

The space of proto-ethics cannot, it seems, be cleansed of this stench of death, since it is death (in the sense of limitation (TO 71)) that delineates the field of obligation. But this limit is something of an *Aufhebung* in Levinas' thought because it is only against the limit of the Other's death that I am to measure my own. This limit is delimited, however, by the third party whose intervention re-plots the co-ordinates of ethical space and redefines its terms. Of course, this alternance *at* the limit is only revealed in/by the face of the other person, the face being at once both the dimension of height (viz. heritability) and that at inter-finition, a plot into which my 'plot' (*mon sort*), which is to matter to me (OBBE 161; AE 250), is woven.

## § 25. Regulation

If philosophy, in its traditional 'Greek' determination, is broadly speaking a preparedness for death (a determination clearly operative in *Being and Time*) and if the φιλόσοφος, as Heidegger reminds us in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, has an eye to the περίττα, namely to what lies beyond the 'limits' of the usual, to that which 'arouses wonder' (Heidegger, 1984, 12), then ought the 'wonder' (*étonnement*) whose provocation Levinas cites as the impetus for writing *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (*C'est cet étonnement qui a été l'objet du livre ici proposé*) (OBBE 181; AE 277)), the wonder at the deposition and abrogation of the self, not to motivate one to *ready oneself* for the 'traumatism of astonishment' (TI 73) one invariably and repeatedly undergoes in the face of the Other? Again, despite Levinas' veto on 'assumption' (*assomption*), must one not take up a position, and occupy a stance, to enable one to meet the incessant demands of ethical life? Ought the cultivation of this habitus not to feature as an integral part in any philosophical 'programme' seeking to redress the status of morality in 'philosophy'? Arguably then, while the oneself is begotten in passivity (I am always already de-centred), qua ethics, first-philosophy (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) is remiss to the extent that it does not attend to what transpires between the 'domicile' and the 'desert,' that is, between my being-at-home-with my self and my being driven from the 'subterranean digs' of my self (OBBE 195 n.11). The interspace or πόρος between these discrete regions of being is uncharted by Levinas in his 'philosophical' works, although the phenomena of liturgy and study, discussed in his Talmudic writings, name activities (or rather, in Levinas' case, *manières d'être*), which structure this space and ready the subject for its vocation. Of course, these phenomena are described by Levinas in exclusively Jewish terms. Moreover, the form of Judaism Levinas takes to be normative is that of the Mitnagdism of his native Lithuania.

Now, I would contend that the tripartite structure of susceptibility, self-attestation and injunction upon which the 'presentation' of the 'face' depends, is both sanctified and sustained by the kind of liturgical activity Levinas acclaims in his Talmudic writings. One might even say, to deploy a Heideggerian phrase, that the face is 'cleared' for signification through ritual, and thus that liturgical space prefigures 'ethical' space, the organisation of which is structured in consonance with the regulatory schemata enforced through the performance of ritual acts. Levinasian first philosophy appeals to, takes as axiomatic, and draws its conceptual resources from a Mitnagdic-Jewish mode of life, or δίκαιτα: a mode of life ordered by Jewish liturgical practices. The kind of 'life' Levinas advocates in his work, the 'way' of

diacony he so painstakingly enunciates, is unthinkable outside this sphere of this liturgical activity. Or, to be more precise, *the adventure of 'ethics' as Levinas outlines it, is instituted and nourished liturgically*. What Levinas will term the 'circumstance' of the 'face' (DR 117), is conditioned aetiologically by social practices whose legitimacy and imperative force attain the degree of invariance they do through generative repetition and renewal.

If 'philosophers' are to co-opt Levinasian motifs, if that is, they are to succumb to what one might call the *attitudinism* of Levinasism, then they must attend to those practices whose performance renders the terms in which Levinas' thought is dispatched meaningful and sets them within their context of signification. Levinas' redrafting of phenomenological procedure (as indicated his method (*procédé*) is an *ὁδός* or path) may challenge the polarization between *θεωρία* and *πράξις*, and extend the sense of 'space' beyond the equipmentality (and the nothingness that subtends it) advanced in *Being and Time*. However, to account for the regulatory mechanisms by which the phenomenon/noumenon of the face is canonized and installed as injunctive, Levinas must provide a more detailed explication of the liturgical practices that govern the outworking of his thought and the liturgical 'space' that arguably prefigures his figuration of the face. Perhaps one must put Levinas' 'philosophy' on a diet (*δίαίτα*), then, so bloated is it with the surety of its own 'staging' that it has lost sight of the ground that sustains it beneath the weight of self-evidence it supports. To be sure, as Levinas contends, 'the ritualism that leads the Jew to devote himself to service with no thought of reward' and 'to accept a burden carried out at his own expense' may be, as he states, 'the original and incontestable meaning of the Greek word *liturgy*' (DF xiv). Yet again, this 'ritualism' (*ritualisme*) relies upon the antecedent structuration of 'ritual' for its sense and one must elucidate this substructure and probe the nature of its relationship to the work of ethics if one is to understand the significance of the 'face' and grasp it in its injunctive environment.

The sacrifice of the 'self,' whose expenditure we, along with Bernet, Bloechl and Ricoeur, have had cause to question, is one consequence of ethical obligation that pushes the 'logic' of Levinas' thought to the point of exulceration. No doubt a problem for a philosophy so resolutely alvine as Levinas' and given to conceiving its distinct phases in terms of the organs of the body and their function. However, this sacrifice of self, which, as we have seen, is both suspended and extended by the presence of the third party ('only the hunger of the third limits the right of the Other' (DF xiv)), gestures, in the order of Levinas' thinking, to the dephasing of the ego *vis-à-vis* the other person, and to the sublation of a certain conceptualization of the



subject within philosophical and religious thought. If, as Jacques Rolland suggests, Levinas, following in the wake of Nietzsche, 'should be understood as a thinker of the death of God' (Rolland, 2003, 89), and, as Nietzsche forewarned us, along with the demise of the 'God' of onto-theology, one must also bid farewell (*adieu*) to the institutions, practices and moral landmarks through which such a 'God' reveals 'Himself,' then a subjectivity defined in terms of the 'insinuation of essence [*comme insinuation de l'Essence*]' (OBBE 177; AE 272)) must likewise be gutted along with the 'God' in whose scattered entrails Nietzsche divined the possibility of the *Übermensch*, and after whom Levinas foresaw the aspect of a 'God' uncontaminated by Being. The 'sacrifice' of the oneself in Levinas must thus be interpreted in its wider signification, and, in a manner entirely commensurate with the *Destruction* of Cartesianism in *Being and Time*, as a moment of transition within philosophical 'history,' a moment as momentous for the programme of philosophy initiated by Levinas (and continued in the work of Derrida, Nancy, Marion, etc.) as 'the crisis of European existence' was decisive for the *ratio* of Husserl's later thought (CRISIS, Appendix I, 299). As Levinas himself explains, 'modern antihumanism...clears the place for subjectivity positing itself in abnegation [*il fait place nette à la subjectivité se posant dans l'abnégation*],' 'in sacrifice,' and 'in a substitution which precedes the will' (OBBE 127; AE 203, emphasis added). This 'place' is the point of departure for Levinas' *ethic of ethics* and the site to which his thinking returns again and again during the course of its radical excursions. A τόπος that is at once both historical and prehistorical, since the subject, qua hostage, is 'older than the ego' (OBBE 117) whose historical articulation it supplants.

Yet, while this subjectxsite, whose devastation Levinas oversees, must cede to the non-site of what he terms, a 'layout without security [*l'étalement sans sécurité*]' (OBBE 179; AE 276), namely the subject qua 'lung,' 'heart,' or 'hands' that give, the 'subject' in question is perhaps more splenetic (a correspondence with Baudelaire Levinas did not accept<sup>16</sup>), and its aspect more spleen like than the aforementioned 'organs' upon whose donative support Levinas draws. Indeed, the 'irritability' (OBBE 143) that troubles the subject of responsibility and attends its restlessness (is the subject, *qua* spleen, the hypostatization of such irritability, the genealogico-generative descendent of the Cartesian conarium or pineal gland, perhaps?) reflects the awkward accord between the 'Jewish' and the 'Greek' currents of Levinas' thought. The 'stage'

<sup>16</sup> Levinas often cites Baudelaire (see, for example, TI 156), although usually disapprovingly, and typically in connection with Baudelaire's poem 'Le Chat.' This poem, featured among a cycle of poems under the heading of 'Spleen et Idéal,' is to be found in the first part of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857).

upon which the transactions of Levinas' thinking *take place* (the stage 'cleared' by anti-humanism) is one whose dimensions are themselves 'cleared' by and through the alternance of Jewish and Greek (JewXGreek) symbological and axiological 'horizons,' horizons that admit of their own distinct hierarchies of organisation and regulation. The concourse of ethical space issues from the concours of these horizons, one might say. '*Me voici*,' whether one understands by this designation Emmanuel Levinas, qua *meforesh*, 'volunteering' his 'vision' of ethical life and hence universalising himself through the course of his 'work' ('here I am, send me') (OBBE 199 n.1), or the responsible subject as an avatar of a protracted process of historical maturation culminating in a conception of subjectivity as susceptibility, names 'one' bound by an alliance between the 'Greek' and the 'non-Hellenism of the Bible' (QA 85). But what manages this alliance and apportions each of its parties their share of influence? After all, the 'face' Levinas deduces is a 'product' of this accord, arising within the 'space' engendered by the vacillation of JewXGreek modes of understanding and comportment.

The face may compel the understanding but its provocation is, I would contend, an emergent property of the field delineated by the concord between these two 'cultural' sites, sites whose topological distinctness we have already had occasion to question. To be *struck down* by something is to move already within the possibility of its affective range, that is, it is to project the space (whether this be termed world-space or ethical space) within which what strikes one is encountered. The entry of the face into one's world is prepared for prior to its arrival, I would argue, although the uniqueness of the Other in her concrete specificity remains that for which one is ill, or under, prepared. It is because communally oriented practices delimit the field of proto-ethics that something like a face can instruct one.

One is encountered by the 'outside' (OBBE 179), I suggest, by the openness of the 'face' whose indigence summons one to its aid, *at the limit* of one's 'world.' Proto-ethics, as such, is limitrophic (a question of negotiations at the limit) and the face a *limitrophe*, or border phenomenon, arising at the limit of one's projective range.<sup>17</sup> However, Levinas will ultimately claim, a claim of dubious standing, that what he, following Heidegger, terms, 'the illuminated site' of understanding, is but the 'passage' or 'withdrawal' of 'God' (EP 77). The face opens in the trace of *illeity*, he adverts (MS 64). Thus, for Levinas, a very different sort of activityXpassivity eventuates at the limit of the 'world' (let us be clear, the determination of 'world'

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, among other reasons, this is why Levinas suggests that the 'human subject' is 'called on the brink of tears and laughter to responsibility' (OBBE 18; emphasis added).

operative here is once again that espoused by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, that relational totality 'wherein Dasein as such already is' (BT §18 [87])). It is the anachoresis of God that *makes room for* the machinations of the understanding, or what we might call, more aptly, the Mitnagdic imagination. It is *from out of this space* that the face signifies *as* a face and not because one readies oneself for the face circumspectively. Aping Heidegger one might say the 'face' Levinas assays is ahead of itself (*sich vorweg*) – the face precedes its prehension and reception – because, as Levinas avers, 'God first contracts himself' in order to make space for it (IGRHV 166). Not only, I believe, does 'Judaism' *contract itself* to accommodate 'philosophy' within Levinas' thought (arguably Levinas' phenomenology stands in the trace of his Jewry), thereby leaving a residue of itself within the latter by which the latter is oriented. But the sense of the face, as Levinas presents it, depends upon one submitting to the notion that 'God' may be, a rather unnerving proposal for many, no doubt, and for this reader included, since the notion of 'God' is invariably enervative for critical thought (or, as Janicaud suggests, the idea of God brings about 'a kind of violation of critical consciousness' (Janicaud, 2000, 46)).<sup>18</sup>

But subtending the cultural sites over whose confluence Levinas presides is the more archaic proto-site of the earth; a basis Husserl had recourse to appraise phenomenologically and Heidegger to celebrate ontologically and poetically, but whose repose Levinas identifies exclusively with the sustenance the earth provides for humans in their enjoyment ('Food, Drink, Shelter...the earth is for that,' Levinas will insist (HGU 233)). Now, in place of 'God,' whose phenomenological credentials lack cogency, Levinas would do well to relate his presentation of the face more closely to its telluric provenance. One may speak of interruption, disturbance, faith, prayer, devotion and surrender, one may scan the horizons of the optatives of hope, charity and compassion, but to moot 'God' as that to which these phenomena point, and to predicate the sense of one's leading concepts upon the self-withdrawal (anachoresis) of such a 'God,' is surely imprudent (unless this contraction is brought to bear generatively by the human community and refers to the removal of 'God' from the margins of history, thereby making room for the properly human, and, by default the properly nonhuman). Levinas is fearful of φῶσις, despite the fact that the nourishment (τροφή) with whose provision the earth graces humanity is perhaps more indicative of the earth's being one who rears (τροφός) than its being that which one deploys to one's nutrimental gain or that which fuels one's appetite (ὀρεξις), even if one is, so to

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<sup>18</sup> Levinas would, of course, deem this violence necessary in order that egoic consciousness be deposed. Understandably, this is not the connotation Janicaud has in mind here.

speak, anorexic, and elementality is pervaded by ilyaity. It may then be, that the trope Levinas enlists from the author(s) of the Biblical Numbers (XI, 12) to describe the ethical relation (I bear the other 'in my breast as the nurse bears the nurseling' (*OBBE* 91)) derives its sense from its terrene ancestry and not from its divine declension. One might say that the nurse bears the nurseling *as* the earth bears the earthling, a suggestion altogether consonant with Husserl's depiction of the earth as an Ark (Husserl, 1981a, 225). Of course, if the earth is Ark and ἀρχή, then as we will shortly discover, the time of the living present Levinas is compelled to reduce to its diachronic *déstructure*, is always already *crossed*, or rather *soiled*, by another time, the time of the earth, a grounding that dispossesses the ego of its status as origin and sets its constitutive life within the context of a more enduring earthly heritage.

Although Husserl himself equivocates over the placement of this origin, believing the Ego to be the source (*Quelle*) of all possible sense, he does recognize that the earth plays a pivotal role in the genesis of sense. Levinas, however, fails to develop his disquisition of the 'elemental' beyond the publication of *Totality and Infinity*. Thus, where he might have employed Jean Wahl's notion of 'transcendence' (and extended its application) to execute a reduction to the 'earth,' and, following Husserl's lead, perhaps advance an understanding of time as in-terre-finitude, he sees in transcendence the 'phenomenon of degradation or erosion of the absolute' (*RS* 8). For Levinas, the elemental is a buccal space – that which is given as a modification of the 'bite' – to be transformed through expropriation and donative acts. Whether the earth is construed according to the scholastic distinction between *materia secunda* or *natura naturata* (nature as 'stuff') and *Natura naturans* (Nature as Divine prototype) it remains a resource for Levinas rather than a source to be accorded respect in its own right. Indeed, Levinas urges us to 'remain masters of the mystery that the earth breathes' (*HGU* 233). A declaration that confirms, quite forcibly, his identification of the earth with the 'intoxication' (*ivresse*) of 'paganism' (*paganisme*), and to his mind, its most heinous manifestation in the form of Hitlerism. As Levinas expresses it in the essay, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' (1957), this 'earth maternity determines the whole Western civilization of property exploitation, political tyranny, and war' (*PII* 53). Yet, Levinas' own presentation of the elemental arguably perpetuates this reign of exploitation, or at least reinforces its hold, because the earth is deemed by him to be either a fund of nutriments or a treasury of consecrated goods. If the earth is τροφός, then evidently this nurse bears 'her' nurseling to the point of mastitis in Levinas' work, a condition that could be relieved, to some extent, were the nonhuman and elemental to be included within the sodality

of the face-to-face relation. As Luce Irigaray observes, what is unattended to in Levinas' thought is that

participation in the construction of a world that does not forget natural generation and the human being's role in safeguarding its efflorescence. A gestation in which the subject as microcosm is not given to nourishing, sheltering, fecundating itself at the expense of the macrocosm for which it no longer shows any concern, believing that it is given once and for all, to be exploited endlessly, carelessly, irretrievably (Irigaray, 1993, 195).

Levinas inherits a Mitnagdic predilection to identify the earth with what he terms 'the drunkenness of the Sacred' (*BW* 48) and it is the nature and severity of this temulence that we must examine if we are to evaluate the legitimacy of Levinas' claim. It is one thing to speak of a 'reverse conatus' (*OBBE* 70) and quite another to disclaim the 'earth' as the province of the 'pagan,' both terms themselves poorly explicated in Levinas' work. If the 'impure element of the 'Sacred' prolongs 'the animal within the civilized,' as Levinas suggests (*BW* 48), then by implication, Judaic conceptualizations of the 'Holy,' engendered by, and sustained through, liturgical practices, civilize and tame the conatus in one (although Levinas would probably maintain that the face is its own *censor morum* and therefore self-legislating). And how does 'Judaism' accomplish this feat? Why by none other than a process of demythicization (the extirpation of myth) and a policy of temperance. It is to a consideration of these phenomena that we now turn for they perhaps provide the key to understanding Levinas' entire oeuvre and to liberating his presentation of the face from its more dubious suppositions. A phenomenological appraisal of the telluric need not amount to teratology, as Levinas is apt to think (namely the study of biological malformation and/or a collection of myths about the monstrous), but may assist one to bring to light what Merleau-Ponty, endorsed approvingly by Janicaud, called 'the invisible of this world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1997, 151; Janicaud, 2000, 34). That which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible; that which gives rise to the 'clearing' (*die Lichtung*) adumbrated by Heidegger; that which shelters the face that reveals itself in the encounter with the other person Levinas describes. To modify what Levinas himself will say of the use of emphasis in his work, 'to describe *this* mutation is also to do phenomenology' (*QA* 89). In part three, we will endeavour to lay bare this 'mutation' and bring to light its phenomenological importation. To do so, however, it will prove requisite to further complicate the conditions under which the face signifies as a face within the work of Levinas, in order to demonstrate that the upsurge of the face is constrained by Hebraic directives.



## **Part III**

### **The Institution of Ethical Space:**

**The legacy of the face**

## 5. EXCAVATION

Philosophy sustains itself through reflection and critique but the issue of its inception, both historically, as an enterprise distinct from θεολογική and μῦθος, and existentially, as a practice or 'work,' remains vexed. In this, the third and final part of my study of Levinas, I do not intend to rehearse at length the arguments promulgated by among others, Husserl and Heidegger, concerning the 'Greek' origins of philosophy. Although I do wish to gauge the legitimacy of their efforts to purge this 'site' or point of origination of foreign influences, and, what is more, to present the reign of philosophy as hegemonic in its Greek formulation. I endeavour, rather, to consider the motive forces that occasion philosophical practice (and that give rise to the phenomenological attitude) in order to further situate Levinas' philosophy against the horizons of its constitution. In so doing, I will attempt to substantiate the thesis that, as I see it, Levinas is engaged in a deliberate programme of demythicization, an initiative, moreover, he believes to be consonant with the directives of ethical metaphysics, yet which I would contend, threatens to undermine the tenor and cogency of his own project.

The theological positings that saturate Levinas' thought ought not to be rendered exempt from scrutiny and must, according to the logic of demythicization to which Levinas adheres, and the trope of eradication he deploys, be excised from their situs and absolved of their mythological denotations. To do this, however, would be to deprive Levinas of his own ethico-metaphysical *Nothelfer* and to prohibit his appeal to the self-evidences of Jewish theological culture (an appeal he makes, albeit in a covert manner, despite his frequent repudiations of theological dogmatism). A move surely regrettable to some (particularly those seeking to consolidate their own theological position), and no doubt regarded as callow by others, but arguably imperative if the internal mandate of Levinas' thought is to be heeded in its exigency.

Notably, of course, it is this very drive toward demythicization, a term we will need to fix in its determination, that Levinas identifies as a major point of concord between 'Jewish' teaching and 'Greek' philosophy and we must ascertain to what extent these discrete sites of provenance regulate and deregulate one another accordingly. We will then be in a position to evaluate the degree to which the conative drive (*conatus essendi*) Levinas so readily disclaims throughout his work impels the programme of demythicization he, himself, oversees. With these aims in view the

trajectory of part three has been delineated and the topoi of chapters five and six outlined for consideration.

## § 26. *Dispensation and disaster*

In the Third Book of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Husserl confers upon the discipline of phenomenology the following shibboleth of investigation: ‘the wonder of all wonders,’ he asserts, ‘is pure Ego and pure consciousness’ (*Das Wunder aller Wunder ist reines Ich und reines Bewußtsein*). This wonder, he continues, the wonder whose motivation provokes philosophical inquiry:

disappears as soon as the light of phenomenology falls upon it and subjects it to eidetic analysis. The wonder disappears by changing into an entire science with a plethora of difficult scientific problems. Wonder is something inconceivable; the problematical in the form of scientific problems is something conceivable, it is the unconceived that in the solution of problems turns out to be conceivable and conceived for reason (*Id* III §12 [75]).

Remaining loyal to the Aristotelian insight that ‘it is precisely through wonder that people today and at the beginning began to philosophise’ (διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν) (Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, A2, 982b 11ff.), and, indeed, like Aristotle opposing wonder (θαυμάζειν) to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), Husserl identifies wonder, here construed as a fundamental ‘attitude,’ as that which incites one to pursue phenomenological investigation. Yet, in the final analysis he appears content to suppress wonder beneath the science it inspires. To be sure, phenomenology is palintropic, and the phenomenologist is one who must begin, or as Husserl confides in the *Cartesian Meditations*, ‘make a new beginning’ (*CM* §3 [48]), again and again; philosophical wonder (*das philosophische Staunen*) being that which motivates such activity (*Crisis* §48). However the τέλος of phenomenology, or so Husserl will insist, is genuine knowledge (*CM* §1 [44]), a claim that militates against the perdurance of wonder as a guiding principle for the scientific enterprise it helps to excite.

Wonder does not, it seems, survive into the discipline it founds, but is suspended as soon as that which is initially encountered as aporetic is elucidated and secured for cognition. Like Aristotle then, Husserl assigns wonder a limited function both historically and methodologically. Aristotle had circumscribed the range of

θαυμάζειν by aligning it with the awareness and displacement of 'ignorance' in those prone to such affection. Hence one begins to philosophize, Aristotle avers, 'by wondering that a matter is so,' whether the object of one's astonishment be the occurrence of the solstices or the 'incommensurability of the diagonal of a square with its side' (Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, A2, 983a 11). Knowledge renders θαυμάζειν redundant and quite superfluous to the requirements of philosophy, since philosophy is accomplished as 'theory' (θεωρία), that is, as the very 'opposite' (εἰς τὸναντίον) of wonder:

And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders); therefore since they philosophised in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end (Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, A2, 982 b 17).

Now, the lover of myth (ὁ φιλόμυθος) may attain the status of a philosopher (φιλόσοφος) because the events narrated in myth are apt to induce a state of perplexity (ἀπορία) in those that hear them, thus prompting those individuals to pursue 'knowledge' of that which dumfounds them. However, although μῦθος is a tissue of wonders, its status in Aristotelian philosophy is suspect and myth is deemed to be subordinate to knowledge acquired through theoretical understanding. Myth reaches a terminus in wonder, one might say, as wonder cedes to θεωρία. For Aristotle therefore, μῦθος is synonymous with nescience, a state of mind (ἔξις) to be surpassed and an impediment to the contemplative life (βίος θεωρητικός) he believed to be the 'end' of philosophy. Myth is ultimately inferior to the ascendant and magisterial λόγος from which philosophy receives its mature form. Philosophy can assume this *mature* identity only by suppressing the form of its inception (μῦθος) and repressing the grammar of its infancy (θαυμάζειν).

In 'The Vienna Lecture' (1935), Husserl traces what he calls 'the outbreak of the theoretical attitude' (*der Einbruch der theoretischen Einstellung*) back to the founding figures of the 'first culminating period of Greek philosophy' (Plato and Aristotle) and to their 'becoming gripped by the passion of a world-view' quite distinct from that of the 'mythical-practical attitude' by which the interests of quotidian life were governed (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 285; *Krisis*, 331). This passion, or πάθος, is of course wonder, which Husserl describes as 'incipient theoretical interest;' a 'variety of curiosity' that disrupts the course of daily life and throws its order of meaning into contention. Two points of note are worth highlighting here. Firstly, Husserl, like Aristotle before him, imputes to wonder (qua historical

occurrence and methodological procedure) the task of ‘reorientating’ the ‘attitude of original natural life’ (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 281). Secondly, he understands philosophy in this connection to be a ‘closed sphere of cognitive activity,’ that is, as pure ‘*theōria*.’ As such, and in accordance with this guiding interpretation, the philosopher assumes the guise of a ‘non-participating spectator’ and ‘surveyor of the world’ (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 285). While θαυμάζειν clearly effects a reorientation of interest, the presumption (inherited from Aristotle) that the remit of its motivation is confined to the initial phases of philosophical activity is problematic. For not only does θεωρία come to assume a position of prominence in philosophical life (an issue with which Levinas will take umbrage), but philosophy is understood principally to comprise of a form of disengaged contemplation.

Although Husserl himself believed θεωρία to be a ‘new sort of praxis,’ that of the ‘universal critique of all life and all life goals, all cultural products and systems that have already arisen out of the life of man,’ a praxis (πρᾶξις), moreover, whose aim was to transform and elevate humanity through the application of ‘universal scientific reason,’ this corporate ‘self responsibility’ (*Selbstverantwortlichkeit*) was to be won on ‘the basis of absolute *theoretical* insights’ (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 283).

Wonder, then, may be catalytic, igniting the theoretical quest, but it is ultimately expendable, an affect to be set aside along with the ‘mythical-practical’ attitude from whose spell, according to Husserl, the founding fathers of philosophy delivered humanity, and from which, in its manifestation as scientific naturalism, phenomenology is to emancipate European civilisation and put it ‘on the road to realisation’ (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 291). As such, phenomenology is a ‘responsible science’ (*verantwortlicher Wissenschaft*), Husserl surmises, because its aims are at once curative and liberatory (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 298; *Krisis*, 346). Indeed, from the rhetoric of ‘The Vienna Lecture’ one might even go so far as to say that phenomenology is guided by a soteriological imperative.

## § 27. *The occlusion of Being*

For Heidegger, a philosopher more deeply entrenched in Aristotelian thought than Husserl, even if the latter’s early research into Aristotle fell under the purview of *Destruktion*, θαυμάζειν is that disposition (*Stimmung*) which compels or transports the philosopher (φιλόσοφος) into the beginning of genuine thinking. Unlike Husserl, for whom wonder is synonymous with curiosity (*Neugier*) – an association repudiated by Heidegger in *Being and Time* where he asserts that ‘curiosity has nothing to do



with observing entities and marvelling at them – θαυμάζειν,’ since it is defined by its ‘never dwelling anywhere’ (*Anfenthaltslosigkeit*) (*BT* §36 [172-173]) – Heidegger discerns an inner multiplicity in the disposition concerned and thus strives to explicate its meaning more precisely. Far from being something accomplished with ease (and, as Husserl intimates in *The Vienna Lecture*, ‘becoming habitual’ (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 285)), the transformation of thinking and questioning into which wonder affectively compels one, is an ordeal or passage (πόρος) of arduous prospect.

In the *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, originally a lecture course given by Heidegger during the winter semester of 1937–1938 at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger presents a detailed analysis of wonder, developing a fourfold typology of this fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) in an effort to elucidate its significance for philosophical reflection and restore its enduring probity. As a fundamental attunement, wonder, or *Er-staunen* as Heidegger refers to it (hyphenating the more common place *Erstaunen* which designates astonishment in a generic sense), is to be distinguished from three related, although dissimilar forms of attunement (‘marvel’ (*Verwunderung*), ‘admiration’ (*Bewunderung*) and ‘amazement’ (*Bestaunen*)) by the fact that it is not occasioned by a ‘determinate individual object of awe,’ an object that might, for example, ‘stand out as being unusual’ in relation to an ‘equally determinate sphere of what is experienced precisely as usual.’ Wonder, rather, adverts to the usual as that which is most unusual, and unusual above all in ‘that it is what it is’ (*BQP* 144). Wonder is, therefore, ‘placed before the unusualness of the usual, in the midst of the usual in everything,’ namely beings *as* beings or ens qua ens, throwing open the space of existential-hermeneutical understanding. Ontological wonder (*Er-staunen*) is the wonder before Being. It is to be understood transitively because it permits what is most usual (beings) to show itself in its unusualness (in the play or *Spielraum* of its Being). As such, and in contradiction to the Husserlian presentation of θαυμάζειν, wonder is not exhausted in the pursuit of θεωρία but displaces Dasein into and before beings.<sup>1</sup>

This displacement (*Versetzung*), which is basic to θαυμάζειν, displaces ‘man into that essence whereby he then finds himself in the midst of beings as such’ as ‘one who perceives and gathers in the open’ (*BQP* 147). Wonder displaces Dasein into the openness of its ‘there’ (*Da*) by ‘casting asunder’ the free-space of the ‘between’ (*das*

<sup>1</sup> As Heidegger will relate in the essay ‘What is Metaphysics?’ it is ‘only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us’ that wonder is ‘aroused’ and ‘evoked.’ It is this ‘wonder’ that occasions ‘the basic question of metaphysics,’ namely ‘why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?’ (Heidegger, 1996 [1949], 109-110).

*Zwischen*) – a space Heidegger will refer to somewhat provocatively as ‘time-space’ (*Zeit-Raum*) – from which beings manifest themselves in their Being. Wonder dwells, or tarries, one might say, in this between, staying patiently with the usual in its unusualness and suffering a decisive lack of passage (ἀπορία) to the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and certainty which the theoretical appraisal of things purports to provide. Indeed, wonder displaces Dasein into a ‘space’ that is prior to and beyond the ambit of ‘explanation,’ because that which can be explained away as such and such a thing, quality, or event, is first encountered and moves within the *Zeit-Spiel-Raum* opened in and by wonder.

Crucially, the basic disposition of θαυμάζειν disposes Dasein to thoughtful questioning, and most importantly, to the posing of the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*). Such questioning, let us take heed, is not to be understood, Heidegger will assure us, as an aspect of our quotidian dealings with the world, but as the ‘tolerating and sustaining of the unexplainable as such,’ a sufferance to be endured despite our being ‘overwhelmed by the pressure of what reveals itself’ (*BQP* 147-148). One must not be mislead, however, into disclaiming wonder as a form of quietism, Heidegger is quick to caution. The tolerance it engenders is marked by a refusal to acquiesce in the face of the usual: wonder (θαυμάζειν), Heidegger urges, is ‘the carrying out of the necessity of the question of beings as such in their region,’ a questioning of beings in their emergence as *that* which they *are*, a questioning, therefore, of beings in their unconcealedness (ἀλήθεια). It is toward this beginning that wonder displaces one, a beginning that is to be suffered as that which ‘overgrows man and in that way transforms him’ (*BQP* 151).

As Heidegger intimates, the necessity that impels such questioning, and motivates the ‘metaphysical historical reflection’ he undertakes (*BQP* 161), arises out of a certain historical-cultural predicament – a predicament defined by Heidegger in terms of the occlusion and occultation of Being – a situation into which Western thinking, according to Heidegger, has been lead through its failure to suffer the aporetic and remain with the difficulty that is its measure. The ‘epoch of the highest abandonment of beings by Being is the age of the total questionlessness of Being’ (*BQP* 160), he argues, an age in which the *discipline* of philosophy has been reduced to an institutional activity wholly at odds with the risky venture entailed by primordial questioning. For the questioning of Being into which philosophy is delivered (through reflection upon, and subsequent repetition and renewal of its first ‘Greek’ beginning (*Anfang*)) threatens to undermine the self evidences upon which Western thought has based its exercise; self evidences that must be called into question and dispatched

with mercilessly lest they continue to impede the task of thinking proper. It is only after thought has undergone and endured a transformation in orientation – a transformation of ‘attitude’ precipitated by the ‘destruction’ Heidegger advocates – that it may accede to the essence of truth in its unconcealment and Dasein may realize its ‘destiny’ (*Geschick*) as a ‘preserver of unconcealed beings’ and ‘the custodian of the openness of Being’ (*BQP* 163).

Wonder thus plays a central role in liberating the free space (*das Freie*) of questioning from the constraints imposed upon it by tradition (by which Heidegger means that process through which something is reduced to being self-evident, merely, as it were, ‘material for reworking’ (*BT* §6 [22])) and exposing Dasein to the questionability (*Fraglichkeit*) of its own being. θαυμάζειν gives rise to that which in the *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (1921-22), Heidegger will term the ‘production of questionability [*Zeitigung der Fraglichkeit*]’ (Heidegger, 2001, 35). As such, it is only when we recognise that we do *not* yet know who we are, Heidegger insists, that ‘we ground the one and only ground which may release the future of a simple, essential existence [*Dasein*] of historical man from itself’ (*BQP* 163).

Through a retrieval (*Wiederholung*) of its ‘Greek’ beginning, Heidegger maintains, philosophy may regain the radicality it lost when its original acknowledgement of beings in their unconcealedness (epitomised for Heidegger by the figures of Heraclitus and Parmenides) became assimilated to those procedures whereby beings, conceived now as the objects of representational acts, became secured in their ‘correctness’ and understood as self-evident (*selbstverständlich*), that is when ἀλήθεια came to be identified with τέχνη in the sense of knowledge against φύσις (the very θεωρία commended by Aristotle and championed by Husserl). The moment the *Grundstimmung* of wonder is eclipsed by ‘the avidity for learning and calculation’ (*BQP* 155), or appropriated to educational ends (or for what, after Plato we might call παιδεία or training), then its potential to transform thought in its bearing is betrayed.

For Heidegger, then, θαυμάζειν, as ontological wonder or *Er-staunen*, is the beginning *and* end of philosophy, surviving into the questioning it provokes as that which sustains the adventure of thought on its difficult path. To be sure, the ‘sober anxiety’ (*nüchternen Angst*) such wonder is said to induce in those prepared, and indeed capable, of suffering it (and for Heidegger only a few privileged thinkers, poets and artists are able to endure the uncertainty into which this attunement places them), the sober anxiety which, according to *Being and Time*, ‘brings us face to face

with our individualized potentiality-for-Being (*BT* §62 [310]), does not seem to prevent Heidegger from resorting to the kind of ‘mystification’ he elsewhere deems a hindrance to philosophical enquiry (*BT* §44 [220]). For, by invoking the notion of a ‘Greek’ beginning or *Anfang*, and by claiming that θαυμάζειν displaces Dasein into the situation of its ‘there’ in such a way that (and tarrying in wonder could certainly be construed as a way or ὁδός) it is only through the ‘renewal’ of *this* Greek beginning, and the attunement that is its πάθος, that *historical* Dasein may attain to itself through the very questionability of its essence (*Wesen*), Heidegger both limits and delimits the ‘potentiality for being’ of those for whom ‘Greece,’ and the ‘hidden history’ (*BQP* 138) it reveals to reflection (the history of Being in its epochality), does not represent the site of origination to which they are called back in their ‘distress,’ nor from which the future, into which they project their possibilities, whether individually or as a people (*Volk*), is instantiated.

Heidegger will, of course, concede that the θαυμάζειν identified by the Greeks with the beginning of philosophy, is an attunement to Being unique to the ‘the great age of the Greeks’ and their ‘brief but magnificent time’ (Heidegger, 1977, 131; 34). This epoch, one of several in the ‘History of Being’ (*Seinsgeschichtliches*), is one to which reflection is compelled to return in order to expose thought, or rather thinking (and by thought, Heidegger will understand ‘the history *we ourselves are*’ (*BQP* 162), ‘we’ being Europeans and principally Germans) to the circumstances of its inception, which, being precisely Presocratic, predate the corruption thought undergoes, together with the ‘clearing’ in which Being releases itself to thought (the free space cleared by wonder), in later Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, and especially during what Heidegger will refer to as the Medieval or Christian periods (Heidegger, 1977, 117).

The crisis of ‘Modernity’ so acutely diagnosed in the essay ‘The Age of the World Picture’ (1938), a crisis defined by the forgetfulness of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*), motivates this attempt at ‘historical’ recovery because, as Heidegger sees it, thinking has run aground in the Modern era and reached its end, its ἔσχατον, in an untimely fashion. Through a process of thinking-back (*Andenken*) to the beginning of philosophy in its incipience, to the θαυμάζειν in which the question of Being was first formulated by the Greeks, and the ‘why’ of beings in their manifestative being first proffered, Heidegger believes thinking can regain its orientation to truth (ἀλήθεια). As it was the basic disposition of θαυμάζειν that first transported Greek Dasein into this basic relation to beings (and ‘there is presence,’ Heidegger avers, only when ‘the clearing (*alētheia*) holds sway’ (Heidegger, 1996

[1969], 447), it is thus through wonder, Heidegger argues, that such transport will again come to pass, and in wonder that the transition from philosophy's *end*, in the calculative thinking of the modern technocratic era, to its (second) *beginning* as primordial or meditative thinking, will be accomplished.<sup>2</sup>

Now, again, the 'more sober minded' thinking that Heidegger espouses in the essay 'The End of Philosophy and The Task of Thinking' (1969), a thinking that is putatively *sober* in contra-distinction to the 'incessant frenzy of rationalization' and the 'intoxicating quality of cybernetics' (Heidegger, 1996 [1969], 449), presents itself, if anything, as temulent in appearance. For not only does Heidegger appear to conflate the 'beginnings' of Greek philosophy with 'the' beginning of philosophy, and moreover, presume the trans-epochal *Urphänomen* of ἀλήθεια (*die Lichtung, Ereignis*) to be given expression by the Presocratics in a way determinate for future thought, that is, determinate for the thinking that thinks the matter of its thought in an originary way, but he also recounts a history of Being (*Seinsgeschichtliches*), a history of the epochs of Being, a history he regards as normative for *historical Dasein*, that excludes the greater part of humankind from its researches. Something of an oversight and indicative of a certain giddiness on Heidegger's part, a giddiness no doubt exacerbated by Heidegger's involvement in the politics of National Socialism, and thus at odds with the very sobriety he lauds.

As Levinas notes in 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' (1957), in Heidegger 'the presocratic texts' assume the status of 'anti-Scriptures' that show 'in what intoxication the lucid sobriety of philosophers is steeped [*dans quelle ivresse baigne la sobriété lucide des philosophes*]' (PII 53; DEHH 171). Of course, the 'lucid sobriety of those who call themselves friends of truth' is nothing but a ruse for 'paganism' (*paganisme*), Levinas believes, whose terms the latter will seek to reverse 'by following a tradition at least as ancient' as that of the 'Heideggerians' (PII 53). To be sure, in the *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Heidegger will insist that the displacement effected by wonder displaces 'man into the beginning of a foundation of his essence,' 'a foundation,' he continues, 'for we can never say that it is the absolute one' (BQP 139). Such a qualification is important for it suggests (and despite Heidegger's damning pronouncements in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, relating the

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger will admit that the σοφοὶ of Ionia did not thematize ἀλέθεια as ἀλήθεια, and that there is a need to think truth in a way that is no longer 'Greek' (Heidegger, 1996 [1969], 447). In his *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (1922), Heidegger had, of course, maintained that 'the real foundation of philosophy is the radical existentiell grasping and production of questionability. To place oneself and life and the decisive realizations in question is the basic concept of all the most radical elucidation. Scepticism is the *beginning*, and it is as the beginning also the end of philosophy' (Heidegger, 2001, 35; emphasis added).



destiny (*Geschick*) of thought to that of the German people) that the beginning(s) into which θαυμάζειν cast early Greek thinkers such as Heraclitus and Parmenides, and indeed 'the' second beginning to which thinking is called 'today,' should we concur with Heidegger in his assessment of the Modern era, ought not to be regarded as archontic for thought, but rather as possible paths for the occasion of its inception and renewal. The origin is plural, one might say, the ἀρχή is dispersed beyond the archology of the Greeks and their German curators and beyond the tradition brought forth by the κρᾶσις of Greek and German thought.

It may be that the origin of primordial questioning, and the thinking to which it gives rise, is, as Heidegger intimates, obscured in the Modern era. However, the drive to fix this origin (radically plural in determination) and delimit its place geographically, to award it its τόπος, is disastrous for the thought that would think its history thus, and ultimately self-refuting, because to posit such an origin (even 'an' origin bestrewn between two poles, or rather, two ἀρχαί) is to withdraw this origin from the world and from the earth that is its source. *Worldly* origins are always already plural, and cannot be exhausted in or by place, especially when construed in such crude nationalistic terms. As Jean-Francois Lyotard contends, Heidegger's originary thinking (his thinking on and of the origin) is an exercise in 'Geophilosophy' (Lyotard, 1990, 80), a species of geopolitics bound to the myth of its own incipience and held enthralled by the prospect of its own greatness.

One need not enter the debate concerning Heidegger's affiliation with Nazism, which is certainly not our intention here, nor dissect the infamous *Rektorsrede* of 1933 (delivered upon Heidegger's appointment as Rector of the University of Freiburg), to appreciate that both overtly political texts, like *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, and more obviously 'philosophical' works, such as *Being and Time*, are 'marked by the same terms' and that these terms are, as it were, 'canonical, or in any case emblematic for existential-ontological thought' (Lyotard, 1990, 71), a point that holds, I maintain, for the relationship between the 'Talmudic' and 'philosophical' currents of Levinas' own thought.

The history of Being (*Seinsgeschichtliches*) cedes, at least during the texts of the 1930's (texts upon which much of Levinas' invective against Heidegger is based), to the myth of Being's geopolitical assembly and Graeco-German destination. Hence, Wonder does not dethrone μῦθος, as Aristotle had proposed, but occasions and sanctions its authority, an authority Levinas will repeatedly challenge while arguably installing his own myth of privilege and election (itself no less peremptory than that

of Heidegger, although Levinas will claim that the tradition to which he appeals ‘does not read right in might’ (*PII* 53)) to counter that of Heidegger and the political party whose aspirations the latter hoped to underpin with his *Seinsdenken*.

There are, it must be noted, resources within Heidegger to recover a different sense of origination than that adumbrated above, and to delineate its trajectory less egregiously. Wonder need not reach a terminus in *θεωρία*, nor fuel the kind of mythomania to which Heidegger, at times, succumbs. Should we recall from *Being and Time* that the ‘whence’ and the ‘whither’ of mood ‘remain in darkness’ (*BT* §29 [134]), and thus indeterminate, a sentiment echoed in the *Basic Questions of Philosophy* where Heidegger states that the ‘whence and the whither’ of primordial questioning ‘as they exist in the beginning,’ namely the beginning into which Dasein is delivered in and by wonder, ‘do not constitute some definite, determinate situation or occasion’ (*BQP* 138), but are rather set forth in the ‘between,’ or *Zwischen*, that disparts beings from Being, we may discern a passage beyond the aporia in which Heidegger’s writings of the 1930’s and 1940’s cast us. If wonder throws open the ‘between’ (the *ens qua ens*), then the condition of its accomplishment surely transcends its instantiation in either Greek or German ‘thought’ (or upon either Greek or German soil (*Boden*)), and indicates that wonder is a trans-cultural, trans-epochal attunement since, as Jean-Luc Nancy confers, ‘the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us* and *the rest of the world*, as *between all beings*’ (Nancy, 2000,19).

Wonder liberates the between, it does not suspend it, nor terminate its range, but rather interrupts the complicity between the first and second beginnings delimited by Heidegger. The ‘history of Being’ is disturbed from within (and from without) by alternative, heterodox histories that announce beginnings that are transgressive of those limits circumscribed by the account of epochality Heidegger enunciates. Indeed, in wonder one meets these limits head on, limits which assail one, and transport one into the region of the between, exposing one to what lies beyond any singular point of commencement, whether ‘German’ or ‘Greek,’ and opening one at the limit to a situation of co-historization altogether more complex than that assayed by Heidegger in his work.

Despite trading one form of historiographical representation of history for another, Heidegger does indicate, albeit cryptically, that the dialogue with ‘Greece’ he envisages, the ‘dialogue that still awaits its beginning,’ the beginning, furthermore, he hoped to inaugurate through a recovery of the primordial questioning requisite to

commencement, is itself the ‘precondition for the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world’ (Heidegger, 1977, 158). There are grounds to suggest, therefore, that Heidegger saw his project as a propaedeutic to a form of trans-cultural ‘thinking’ (a case Reinhard May has argued with great perspicuity in his monograph *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources*). Unfortunately, this imperative, if one may call it that, is largely obscured by the rhetoric of *Seinsgeschichtliches*, and its mythico-poetic explication, so that the encounter with the *Fremd*, which might have exposed the limits and limitations of ‘epochality,’ is expedited by Heidegger in a few gnomic passages (with the notable exception, perhaps, of the essay ‘A dialogue on Language’ (*Unterwegs zur Sprache*) (1959 [1971]), which features a discussion between a Japanese and a German scholar. No doubt quite an ‘encounter’ for a thinker as seemingly provincial as Heidegger.)

## § 28. *The norms of morality*

Levinas, who declares himself to be for the Greek tradition – ‘it is not at the beginning of things,’ he affirms, ‘but everything must be able to be “translated into Greek”’ (WSNP 224) – contests, as we have seen, the Heideggerian presentation of truth (ἀλήθεια). Wonder, qua *Er-staunen*, is likewise ill equipped, Levinas believes, to serve as the founding impulse or disposition of philosophy, since *Er-staunen*, being principally ontological in importation (namely the wonder before Being), does not, or so Levinas will maintain, suffer the trauma of the human others in its charge: θαυμάζειν is insufficiently traumatic to occasion the supererogation in which Levinas discerns the accomplishment of ethical relations. The question of Being (*Seinsfrage*), provoked for Heidegger by the sheer oddity of the ordinary, namely beings, does not mark the beginning of the philosophical programme Levinas instigates, since ethics, he insists, is ‘more sublime than ontology’ (QA 90). Indeed, the question of Being and the ‘wonder in which it is opened’ attest to the ‘original insomnia of thinking’ (TBQO 120), and the passing of the near one, rather than to the sufferance of that which arises, opens, and presences, itself before one phainesthetically. Levinas, of course, appeals to a somewhat truncated form of wonder (*étonnement*) evoked solely in the face of the human other and thus regulated by prevenient taxonomical distinctions which inhibit the ambit of its provocation. In Levinas’ case, therefore, one must speak of the contra-natural aspect of wonder, the ‘wonder of the I claimed in the face of the neighbour,’ the ‘wonder of the I relieved of self and fearing for the other’ (EN 147), a wonder unaccommodating in its refusal to

be affected by the non-human creature and hence numb to the solicitations of those who are not endowed with 'language.' The 'beginning of philosophy' is 'the *human possibility* of giving the other priority over oneself' (PJL 170), one is informed.

For Levinas, wonder arguably remains the *Grundbestimmung* or πάθος of philosophy. However, the term is denuded of its Heideggerian (ontological) denotations and inflected ethically in Levinas' thought, such that the *étonnement* in which 'first philosophy' begins, is inspired *traumatically* by the face that impeaches one and summons one to respond to it. As Levinas adverts in *Otherwise than Being*, the 'wonder' whose displacement (*déplacement*) he endeavours to chart in that work, (and let us take note of the extract from Goethe's *Faust* with which Levinas begins the closing chapter of *Otherwise than Being* (*Au dehors*), of which the last line reads 'Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bester Teil [the greater part of man is shuddering]') is the wonder aroused by the 'coring out' (*dénucléation*) and 'trembling of substantiality' (*le frémissement de la substantialité*) (OBBE 180; AE 276); a shuddering (*un frémissement*) which, according to Levinas, translates the Platonic term φρίκη (OBBE 192 n.22), a term Plato deploys in the *Phaedrus* to capture the sense of awe one experiences upon beholding a 'successful copy of original beauty' in 'any godlike face or form' (Plato, 1900, 56 [251]). This reference to Plato is not incidental, for Levinas' privileging of the supersensible is decidedly Platonic in its articulation, even if his work initiates, as he himself suggests, 'a return to Platonism in a new way' (MS 58).

Clearly then, the wonder Husserl believes befits the 'pure Ego' (*reines Ich*) retains its fascination for Levinas. The latter, however, fixes the determination of this *Stimmung* more precisely than Husserl by restricting the compass of its affective sway to the fissuring of the ego and the deposition of the 'I,' a movement that is itself 'in' and 'of' the face, Levinas will proffer (MS 64). The *étonnement* Levinas prizes may thus be characterized as a disturbance (*dérangement*) of the site of the self. To be sure, the relationship with the other is a relationship with a 'mystery' (TO 75), but the wonder induced by the face of the other divests the ego of itself, and it is this very deposition that sustains the wonder in which philosophy begins, prolonging its affective influence. As Kosky affirms, 'the responsible self *begins* again in each instant' such that its birth 'never has the status of an origin' (Kosky, 2001, 92; emphasis added). Moreover, this predicament of perpetual incipience, termed, as we have seen, recurrence (*le récence*) by Levinas, preserves the wonder Aristotle, and to some extent Husserl, adjudged to be subordinate to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), by countering the charge of θεωρία and situating ethics at the heart of philosophy.

Indeed, Levinas will describe recurrence, qua 'awakening' (*l'éveil*), as the 'shudder of incarnation' in which a 'subject *becomes a heart*' (GP 144; emphasis added), a beginning, furthermore, inaugurated an-archaically, that opens the field of proto-ethics, the pneumatological space of the soul (*l'âme*) whose *espacement* Levinas ventures to plot throughout the closing pages of *Otherwise than Being*. The soul, or 'pneumatism' (*la pneumatisme*) (OBBE 181; AE 278), is the name Levinas ascribes to that figure of subjectivity he believes survives the dissolution of the autarkic ego and best describes the situation of exposedness into which the 'I' is cast (and through which it is formed) upon being encountered by the other person. An encounter, let us be clear, that has always already elapsed, a meeting that has taken place before the advent of the self.

This situation is to be understood historically and meta-physically, since the post-Nietzschean climate of academic philosophy ('the death of a certain god inhabiting the world behind the scenes' (OBBE 185)) sets the parameters for the analysis of subjectivity Levinas advances and the horizons of ethical life he sketches<sup>3</sup> (his polemic is waged against the order of the 'modern world' (OBBE 184)) and because the 'soul' whose non-site he details, a soul that does not, he asserts, enter into 'the spaces of history' (OBBE 184), is the 'production' or 'creation' of a relationship with exteriority which, according to Levinas, lies beyond the remit of what may properly be construed as natural, that is, as being of φύσις. Similarly, Levinas notes, the face of the other puts into question mere historical configurations of value (those authorized by the Western philosophical tradition(s)) and in so doing ratifies its own trans-historical status by locating its site of provenance outside of history. The face 'bears witness to our age and marks it,' Levinas asserts (QA 81). To be sure, this is a contentious claim and one whose legitimacy we have already had cause to doubt. For we have argued, against Levinas, that although there are grounds to defend the instantiation of trans-historical, trans-cultural structurations of meaning (embodied, for example, in practices and attitudes such as dwelling, sharing, donation, the taking of nourishment and nurture, or founded upon the basis of communally recognised mores and interdicts), Levinas' proposal that in the gaze of one human being looking at another, one arrives at 'meaning' in 'its nonhistorical simplicity,' and, moreover, that this meaning ('the intelligible') permits one to judge 'the saraband of

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<sup>3</sup> The 'world weariness' Nietzsche treats in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1969, 224), one could perhaps say, is the point of departure for the account of lassitude one reads in *Existence and Existents*, lassitude, no doubt, brought on by the predicament of post-war Europe.



innumerable and equivalent cultures on the basis of the ethical' (MS 58) is far from convincing, and remains open to scrutiny.

Levinas will argue, of course, that moral conscience (delineated, we note, in decidedly nuanced terms), is 'the critique of all principle of the presence of self to self,' a proposition that allows him to conclude that 'if the essence of philosophy consists in going back from all certainties toward the principle,' if, that is, philosophy 'lives from critique,' then it is the face of the other that is the 'starting point of philosophy' (PII 59). However, this point of origination which, a propos of Levinas, substructs the security of the *subiectum*, itself lacks the security of a ground or base upon which the force of its injunctive appeal could be confirmed. Being precisely *an-archic*, this principium deprives itself of the certainty necessary to guarantee the course of its critical movement and ensure the term of its influence. As such, one might argue, proto-ethics is hypocritical, sub-liminal even, passing below the threshold of consciousness and its phenomenological scansion. For if the wonder (*étonnement*) of the face renders one ἄτοπος, or out of place, ejecting one from the site of one's self, and if this process of cavitation is the movement by which the oneself, qua soul, is produced, then the 'I' is in *no position to be able to affirm* the identity of that which affects (and effectuates) it so absolutely. In the absence of an ἄρχή, the face, like the ego it deposes, is set adrift outside the figure or form (μορφή) that would enclose it and from which it would signify *as* a face.

Even in its absence, it seems, as 'the trace of a departure' (OBBE 179), the face cannot be brought to light and made to appear in its phenomenality, and thus made to appear *as* itself, because in its anarchy it is beyond exhibition. Yet Levinas will persist in his belief that the 'norms of the absolute,' the 'norms of morality' which are 'not embarked in history and culture,' permit one to 'judge Cultures' (MS 59). But upon what basis does one found such judgement if the 'space' into which one is cast asunder by the face – the *Zwischen* or *Zeit-Spiel-raum* opened in wonder – precludes the positionality the assumption of principia (ἀρχαί) would allow? Again, if *étonnement* induces ἀπορία or confusion, can one make the passage (πρόρος) to the certainty of judgement in the midst of this unsettling perplexity? Indeed, is this situation of ἀπορία not, as Levinas appears to intimate, 'prior to the ethical compulsion to the neighbour,' a situation (although a setting without *situs*) in which the intrigue of ethics, and the illeity in whose trace the face signifies, is indistinguishable from the ilyaity of the *there is* (TPA 224)? Rather than suffer the 'excellence' of this confusion, Levinas will discern in the agitation it provokes a certain 'nobility' (a nobility reminiscent of the admiration (*Bewunderung*) Kant

attributes to one's appreciation of the moral law within), a confusion in and through which one's 'substitution for the neighbour grows in disinterestedness' (TPA 224), rather than diminishes. But how can one trust that this predicament of 'confusion' will engender the disinterestedness Levinas esteems? Levinas himself questions how one 'can specify *concretely* this antiquity which is the trauma of awakening' (CIOI 218), but ultimately guards against the stupefaction such exposure occasions by presenting it as though it were 'an *order* given' (CIOI 218). Thus, that which is aporetic ordains me to my neighbour *as* my neighbour. And how is ordination possible amidst confusion, one may wonder? A statement from *Beyond the Verse* facilitates an answer. Responsibility for others, Levinas avers, is '*prescribed* by a non-archaic monotheism (BV xvii; emphasis added). The 'norms' of the morality, norms, or ἀρχαί, that are purportedly not instituted historically, or culturally, are *prescribed*. They are prescribed, furthermore, 'outside the order of the here below' and set forth in a book (the Torah) which, according to Levinas, 'must already be from heaven by its content,' from heaven, that is, because 'its demands clash with the pure ontology of the world' (CTI 61)!

## § 29. *Breaking the spell*

The axiomatics of the face, enforced vigorously throughout the Levinasian corpus, draw their administrative power directly from the 'teachings' of the Torah; teachings whose (putative) ouranic origin renders them all but impervious to the kind of hermeneutical disquisition Levinas reserves for both the themata of 'philosophical' discourse and the adherents of 'pagan' religious traditions. The face *may be* (*peut-être*) the 'starting point' of philosophy, however, if philosophy is to 'live from critique' (PII 59), as Levinas maintains it must, ought the reduction it performs not to extend to consider the aetiological conditions of its own delivery, in this case the historical provenance of the face qua face, its historicity and genealogical derivation? The 'Teaching,' a synonym for the Torah, marking the equivalence of lore and Law, begets the 'face,' but removes the traces of its installation (failing to evaluate the legacy by which it came to be held as normative and compelling) from the field of phenomenological enquiry, thus obscuring the historico-cultural patinations of the face and concealing the horizons of its implication. Indeed, if to philosophize is, as Levinas asserts, to 'decipher a hidden writing in a palimpsest' (HH 96), then Levinas' own work is, I would contend (if I may be permitted the following neological indulgence), properly palimpsestual, since it erases from the thinking of

the face to which it is committed, the traces of that thought's ancestry, while rewriting history as 'Holy History' (*Heilsgeschichte*) – an act of revisionism certain to give some readers the rub, but entirely in keeping with the Hebraic mandatum to purge history of its 'pagan' heritage.

The 'truth' against which this lore of the face is to be measured 'comes from elsewhere' and is 'dated according to a chronology called Holy History' (*RIJT* 129), a chronology, moreover, foreclosed to archaeological interrogation because the events it recounts are no longer of terrene origin: a 'history' as seemingly arcane as the 'history of Being' enunciated by Heidegger and surely as phantastic (evidently such a history is a product of midrashic free variation). If 'the norms of morality are not embarked in history and culture' (*MS* 59), if they are visited upon us from 'beyond,' where the 'beyond' is that which transcends the open region of disclosedness (*die Lichtung*), then it is clear from Levinas' Talmudic writings that the Torah (and, more explicitly, the earnest study of it) is the point of contact between the 'world' and its 'beyond,' the interface between heaven and earth, what we might call the hinge (*le gond*), or axis, between the two. Now, if Derrida is correct in his assertion that 'the complicity of theoretical objectivity and mystical communism' informs Levinas' criticism of Heidegger (Derrida, 1978, 87), would we not be equally justified in highlighting a similar, and no less dubious complicity between proto-ethical obligation, the putative immutability of the Torah, and its teachings in Levinas' work? In principle, is such complicity any less problematic than the aforementioned concordance in Heidegger's thought? Again, if Judaism is 'the bearer and subject of Holy History' (*JK* 129), that which 'ruptures the natural and the historical' (*DJ* 4), it must, one would assume, be that which Levinas has in mind when, in the essay 'Meaning and Sense' (1972), he claims that the 'norms of morality' (norms, no doubt, prescribed by the Torah) make it possible to 'judge Cultures' (*MS* 59). And judge them of what we may ask? The indictments are various and range from a culture being 'disoriented,' or 'infantile' (*MS* 58), to it being 'idolatrous' (*CTI* 58), 'spiritually mediocre' (*SWAB* 138), 'barbarian' (*OE* 73) and 'pagan' (*SWAB* 137). Such pronouncements (and the above examples can be multiplied easily), typically unqualified and rarely explicated, punctuate Levinas' texts and form a point of accord (perhaps the point of accord) between his 'Talmudic' and 'philosophical' writings.

If transcendence is to be thought in its sense as 'a change of site' (*TIS* 163) – *étonnement*, we recall, attests to the devastation of the site of the self – and the 'event' after which Levinas inquires is 'antecedent' to the 'given cosmos of Greek rationalism' (*EE* 101), the κόσμος upon which the 'beyond' purportedly opens, then

is Levinas not equating the ‘event’ (*événement*) of the face-to-face, in its positivity, with the τόπος of the Torah and, more specifically, a pointedly Hebraic ἀρχή? To be sure, ‘the reverting of thematization into *anarchy*,’ by which the eversion of the self is accomplished (the situation whose ‘wonder’ Levinas seeks to convey), pushes the language of classical phenomenology to the limits of its articulation. However, can Levinas be certain that the ‘paradox into which phenomenology finds itself abruptly thrown’ here, the paradox of hetero-affection ‘found at the level of this reverting,’ what Levinas will term ethics, is ‘beyond politics’ (*OBBE* 121; emphasis added)? For does the change of site Levinas associates with transcendence (a change of site, furthermore, upon which the redaction of ‘holy History’ is predicated by him) not rather imply an *amendment of political principles* and mark a change in the πόλις (and the institution of its laws) from which this philosophy is brought forth; a move therefore *from* ‘Athens’ *to* ‘Jerusalem,’ albeit a move that is always underway and never reaches a terminus, for even anarchy must be repeatedly staged and rigorously renewed?

Of course, Levinas is not claiming to have supplanted ‘Greece’ completely, nor ousted the λόγος from its ‘Greek’ source, since this ἀρχή is generative in nature. Thus, he insists, while Israel is to be defined by the fact that it promotes ‘understanding between all men who are tied to morality,’ the basis of this ‘civilisation’ is, Levinas will maintain, ‘the Reason that the Greek philosophers revealed to the world’ (*SC* 109). The civilization adverted to is processual and not fixed, however, as it defines a process of ‘transformation’ (*DJ* 5) and not a state toward which things tend (or a State in which order might be accomplished, such as *Ersatz Israel*, for example), despite the fact that it is oriented towards ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ (*OBBE* 183). As such, it is programmatic in determination: something to be implemented by *all those who are tied to morality*. But what of those who fall outside the ‘city’ precincts or refuse its πολῖτεία? What of those whose dwellings are ‘rural,’ the *pāgānus* or pagan (*païen*)? Do those who are not bound by the aegis of this moral law, and who do not submit to the ‘culture’ in which it is encoded, require civilization? Are these individuals beyond the pale, or simply *beyond the face*? What form is this process to assume and by what stipulation is its performance to be regulated?

Despite appealing to the ‘Jew in every man’ (*DJ* 4), a formal indication that non-Jews are, of course, to be included in the ‘programme’ of outreach Levinas envisages, I believe that in its application, Levinas’ ethic of ethics fails to accommodate admixture (according to Levinas, the Jewish tradition aspires toward

that 'essence without admixture that can be called Spirit' (*DD* 141)), and remains intolerant of figurations of 'morality' that do not resemble those truths ventured at Sinai, which, as Derrida cautions, is both the name of 'the place where the Torah was given' and a metonymy for 'the border or frontier between Israel and other nations,' a 'front and a frontier between war and peace,' and thus not without ambiguity (Derrida, 1999, 63-64). Arguably, the unseating of the 'I' effectuated in the face of the other person (proto-ethical orientation), is reprised at the level of culture by the movement of ethics as it disseminates, renews and repeats its origin throughout the nations of its exile, nations whose 'wisdom,' according to Levinas, it may be necessary to 'overturn' (*OE* 73).

Is one to assume, then, that dissemination and desecration are conjoint ventures? Certainly, for Levinas, Judaism has, and is to have, a thurifying role in world-historical affairs, cleansing the Nations of the stench of the numinous to which they have become accustomed, and, like a censer, clearing the space of world history for the coming of the Holy one. Hence, he will maintain (and not without enthusiasm, one must add, a 'passion' Levinas typically associates with the pagan, only to admonish it) that 'Judaism has decharmed the world' (*RFA* 14), 'sublimated idols,' and 'demystified the universe' (*HGU* 234). Furthermore, he will allege that Judaism is 'destructive of pagan gods' (*TIS* 166), 'breaking the spell' of the Sacred (*ML* 180), and emancipating humankind from its disingenuity and guile. Judaism, Levinas concludes, has the 'formidable privilege of being able to destroy and restore whole worlds' (*MI* 51). Such comments are unfortunate and not a little spurious, not least because they base their authority upon biblical proscription and align themselves with that most subreptitious of Decalogical requirements prohibiting the erection of graven images and reviling the worship of 'foreign' gods.

Despite his calumination of 'song' – 'the idea of toil being connected with study is essential,' Levinas will assert, 'it also serves to distinguish clearly between the Torah and Song' (*CTI* 69)<sup>4</sup> – the epinikion of Western rationality can clearly be heard to resound behind statements of this sort, dare one say, like 'the echo of a sound that would precede the resonance of this sound' (*OBBE* 111), or, more tellingly, like the silent first letter of the Hebrew alphabet that precedes the first letter of that

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<sup>4</sup> Evidently the connection between suffering and song is lost on Levinas. One need only think of 'Negro' spirituals, the Blues, Flamenco, Fado, and Tango (to name a few music forms), to recognize the profundity of the relationship between the two. The phonic structure of Talmudic reading is also glossed over by Levinas here. That the Torah itself contains elements of hymnody, not to mention the rhythmic use and repetition of language, is, I think, indisputable. Indeed, is Levinas' prose not itself, as Janicaud has noted, 'incantatory' (Janicaud, 2000, 27)?



alphabet. Philosophy and Judaism are unified in intent, Levinas believes, for philosophy was born 'on Greek soil' to 'dethrone opinion' (*PII* 48) and to put to rest the poets of mimesis (μῆμησις), while Judaism has 'sought only to bring an end to mythologies and the violence they exert on reason' (*SC* 107).

Not only, then, does Levinas celebrate this accord of purpose between 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem,' but he identifies Judaism almost exclusively with the Mitnagdism of his native Lithuania, a form of Judaism for which study of the Torah-Talmud is paramount. Now, Levinas may contend that the contestation of the 'I' in the face of the Other 'opens the infinite process of scrupulousness which causes the I to coincide less and less with itself' (*TH* 12). Transposed to the arena of inter-cultural (or indeed, intra-cultural) encounter however, this process of mundification begins to assume a more sinister prospect. For the deposition of the 'I', sanctioned under the authority of the 'face' ('sacrifice is the norm of the approach' (*EP* 76), the norm of morality prescribed by the Torah) legitimates a policy of inter-cultural militancy that, while no doubt conducted as part of the 'just war waged against war' (*OBBE* 185), the war fought against iniquity and injurious acts, positively encourages the destruction of 'sacred groves,' and condones the 'purity of this vandalism' (*HGU* 232) on ethical grounds. A fate no doubt akin to that of the opulent statues of reclining Buddhas now buried beneath the earth by the Taleban in the Bamian Valley of Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the 'groves' (*les bosquets*) to be razed are apt to be construed in structural terms, and as Husserl reminds us in *Ideas*, the 'sense' (*Sinn*) of something perceived 'cannot burn' (*Id* §89 [184]). Thus, it is structurings of meaning that elide or obviate proto-ethical 'orientation' that are to undergo *Destruktion* (Levinas will refer to the 'barbarism of being,' for example (*PIC* 187)). However, such structures, like the 'prelogical' mentality accented by Lévy-Bruhl, to which, as we shall see, Levinas refers frequently, are embedded culturally and embodied through a disparate range of traditions, practices and modes of comportment. Quite how one 'decharms' (*RFA* 14) a structure, without treating its egological, intersubjective, or cultural instantiations, is moot.

Levinas may wish, as Adam Newton rightly contends, 'to transcendentalize the local and particular.' Yet, these remain at the 'level of an inherited tradition for

<sup>5</sup> In 'Judaism and Revolution,' Levinas will write: 'Let us destroy the alters of false gods! Let us cut down the sacred groves! Let us not consecrate them to the true God. At the very most we can *explain the causes behind the customs*, but let us rid humanity of them' (*JR* 101). That so called 'pagan' religious traditions merit such treatment is, perhaps, hardly surprising, and is clearly prefigured in the Old Testament. A graphic example is to be found in 2 Kings (23:20), where, in addition to his destruction of pagan 'high places,' Josiah, we are informed, 'slew all the priests of the high places who were there, upon the altars, and buried the bones of men upon them.'

him,' a privilege, furthermore, of 'Jewish genealogy as well as Jewish intellectual legacy' (Newton, 2001, 84). Arguably, then, the law of faciality is underwritten by the teaching of the Torah, teaching that presages the execration of the 'sacred' (*le sacré*) to be found throughout Levinas' work and justifies its abolition through appeal to the logic of Hebraic lore, lore, moreover, whose propriety is safeguarded by the 'central place in Judaism of teaching' in order 'to *ensure* the religiosity of religious discourse' (*ORLFG* 97; emphasis added). An inherently circular and self-legitimizing logic, I would assert.

If Israel, as Levinas exhorts, is 'faithful to the law of those nations with an excess of moral scruple' (*OS* 66), are we to assume that those nations for whom such 'scrupulousness' differs in its organization, or for whom the regard of the Other does not engender responsibility in a manner commensurate with the 'Jewish' (Mitnagdic) susceptibility for the face, are to be domesticated and brought under the rule of 'monotheism,' the law of the domicile, the tutelage of the Same?<sup>6</sup> Are heterogenetic ethical traditions, and the nations of their institution, to be subordinated to that tradition, community, or people for whom 'the *true* spirit descended into a text in order to be universally fulfilled' (*SWAB* 137)? Indeed, as Bernasconi argues with considerable force, 'the ethics of asymmetry in favor of the Other is, when transferred to the cultural level, readily converted into an inequality in favor of the culture which produced that ethics of asymmetry.' Thus, Bernasconi continues, when Levinas 'does exercise his capacity to judge transculturally this is the usual conclusion' (Bernasconi, 1990, 79). Of course, Levinas himself willingly concedes that for him, the Bible is 'the model of excellence,' an admission he freely grants himself despite 'knowing nothing of Buddhism' (*RW* 164). But this decisive lack of cross cultural understanding does not, it seems, prevent Levinas from subsequently denouncing Buddhism, and the religious traditions of Asia as 'Idolatry,' or as Levinas puts it, mere 'fads' from 'India and China,' and from rejecting the 'intellectual temptations of the relative' in which they purportedly trade (*AGCW* 176).

One could argue, in Levinas' defence, that ontological significance (ontological structuration) is of broader relevance than its empirical exhibition and therefore transcends cultural variation in meaning. However, the derogation of Asiatic culture of which Levinas is guilty is not entailed by such a project, and betrays a prejudice towards modalities of 'religious' expression that do not obey the ratio of either 'Athens' or 'Jerusalem.' A prejudice no doubt partly accounted for by

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<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, of course, Levinas will insist that 'monotheism signifies human kinship,' the 'idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face' (*TI* 214).

discriminatory tendencies with Mitnagdic Judaism itself, the relationship between the latter and Hasidism being a case in point. Hilary Putman's assessment of Levinas is entirely apposite, then, when he suggests that he finds 'in Levinas' writings on religion not an intolerance for other religions but an intolerance for other religious sensibilities than his own' (Putman, 2002, 53). Thus, while Levinas will purport that Judaism is a 'school of xenophilia and anti-racism,' the 'supernatural gift' of seeing that one man is absolutely like another man 'beneath the variety of historical traditions kept alive in each case' (ML 178), the tutelage offered by this 'school' is not always true to its mandate. For by claiming for itself the status of that which transcends the variance of history, and thereby assigning Jewish ethical teaching a supra-historical authority, this humanism of the other man fails to interrogate the historical media through which its 'heavenly' missive is sent.

Invariably, the agency of transmission adulterates even the 'purest' of teachings (*traduttore traditore*), and Levinas' 'teaching' (*enseignement*) on the face suffers the impediment of its Mitnagdic provenance. Those who reject the truth of the 'Torah' (*apikorsim*), or who are unfaithful to its law (*minim*), are, according to Levinas, to be sublimated, even though such charges of infidelity may issue from an absence, on Levinas' part, of cross-cultural understanding, and an inability to negotiate the conceptual and axiological complexities of heterodox systems of thought, rather than from any shortcomings with the tradition or individuals in question.

Once again, therefore, I believe a certain slippage has occurred between the orders of the proto-ethical (the face-to-face in its immediacy) and the ethical (the cultural administration of morality), since Levinas will introduce each as a confirmation for the other, translating indiscriminately between them. This ploy, notably olefiant in execution, is indicative of what we might call a *philosophy on the slide*. Less a phenomenology of slippage (a phenomenology given to the description and exhibition of such instances of interruption), than a philosophy unsure of its footing, despite its appeal to what Husserl would term the 'validity ground' of its dogmatic heritage (*Crisis*, Appendix VI, 373); a philosophy for which a horizon of implicit certainty is presupposed, taken as unassailable and self evident, yet never made thematic as such. A slippage, or *glissement de sens*, moreover, no less serious than those 'relapses into the natural attitude [*Rückfalle in die natürliche Einstellung Krisis*]' (*Crisis* §48) cautioned against by Husserl, relapses that indicate a lapse of philosophical temperance and suggest that the work of Levinas is liable, at crucial moments, to lability.

Further, this slippage attests, I would contend, to an inversion of the 'one-way' movement of 'unique sense' (*MS* 49), or at least the logic of its accomplishment, that Levinas defends *throughout his work*, and I wish, as I proceed, to situate these lapses with respect to the work whose order they disturb. The following may be volunteered by way of demonstration. The 'identification of one who scorns the Torah with the *apikoros* [idolater] requires an explanation,' Levinas advises, since

The Germara identifies the *apikoros*, disdainful of the Torah, with one who offends his fellow in the presence of a rabbinic doctor. Contempt that does not remain a theological attitude, *but immediately becomes contempt for humanity and a defiant challenge to one's fellows* (*CT* 62).

Because Levinas believes the meaning of the Torah already 'tears the texture in which it is held' (*OJRS* 110), like the saying that undoes the said, and because this meaning is immediately ethical, the identification of those who shirk their ethical responsibility with the *apikoros* is not, he claims, without cause. However the slippage brokered above occurs, I would maintain, because throughout his work Levinas inverts the order of accomplishment between the terms in question, such that those who do not 'recognize' the Torah (qua Holy Scripture), those who do not genuflect before the monotheist 'God,' are to be regarded as morally inferior, and, as we have seen, 'spiritually mediocre peoples' (*SWAB* 138).<sup>7</sup> The polarity is thereby reversed and a theologic, or theological conceptuality, explicitly denied one must note, is posited (dare we say consecrated) as normative. To be sure, there are those for whom such indictments will appear captious. However, Levinas' writings repeatedly confirm this reading through their flagrantly injudicious, phenomenologically vague and ethnographically tendentious appraisals of the 'pagan' other. Indeed, despite distancing himself from Heidegger's *Seinsdenken*, Levinas' own thought as marked by a municipalism no less 'Ulyssean' in outlook, a thought that returns again and again to its point of origination, or site of provenance, in the scriptural tradition(s) of Judaism. The being-at-home-with-oneself (*le chez soi*), of which apropos of Levinas, 'European history has been the conquest and jealous defence' (*OBBE* 178), is as much the jurisdiction of Levinasian thought as those thinkers he arraigns for their regressive ontological commitments.

If the face is the 'source from which all meaning appears' (*TI* 299), then it is through the spiritual optic of scripture that such meaning is refracted. Scripture is the

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<sup>7</sup> Levinas strives to legitimate this passage in the light of his observation that 'the crisis of sense is experienced by our contemporaries as a crisis of monotheism' (*MS* 47).

locus or place (τόπος) where meaning is cleared (SAW 127), a Levinasian 'Open' (*Offene*), or 'clearing' (*Lichtung*), and a 'region' as suitable for deconstruction, one would imagine, as the pagan repositories of superstition and 'magic' Levinas impugns. Levinas, of course, imposes a moratorium on such interpretation, insisting that 'the vessel of Scripture' can 'hardly be endangered by the squalls of a few philologists' (SAW 130). In what follows, Kosky's observations, typically so instructive, verge on the platitudinous and are indicative of the prevailing movement within Levinasian scholarship where Levinas is hailed as the doyen of the theological 'left':

But the religion, the Judaism, operative in Levinas' phenomenology' is certainly not articulated in a dogmatic or orthodox form, and the fact of Levinas' own Judaism *does not decide the phenomenological status of his text* – neither for better or worse. If Judaism does appear in the phenomenology, it is a Judaism that thinks or speaks heritically, hyperbolically, or perhaps heterodoxically – what Judaism has not yet said about what it has *always secretly harboured* (Kosky, 2001, 161).

Against Kosky, I would argue that Levinas' Mitnagdism does indeed determine the phenomenological status of his work, founding the logic of its enunciation, and establishing the formal criteria and figures by which the thought, to which it gives rise, is regulated and deployed. Levinas' 'phenomenology' is situated within the field of articulation of Mitnagdic Judaism, the space of interplay between the structures of meaning and axiological proclivities formalized within this discursive economy, and those ruptures of order which disturb its distribution of sense (*sens*). The 'pagan' is, henceforth, one such figure of disruption, we may assume, an 'abuse of language,' even (*OBBE* 9).

To be sure, Levinas will concede that 'a pagan who knows the Torah is the equal of the High Priest.' This, he opines, illustrates 'the degree to which the notion of Israel can be separated, *in the Talmud*, from any historical, national, local or racial notion' (*RFA* 22; emphasis mine). However, despite this intra-textual, intra-hemeneutical lenience, the exergual implementation of the rabbinic teaching Levinas endorses here does not find its fulfilment in the work to which Levinas signs his own name. Thus, while Llewelyn is in principle correct to conclude that 'ethical "monotheism" is compatible with religious polytheism' (Llewelyn, 2002, 139), in reality (and as Heidegger reminds us in the essay 'Science and Reflection,' the word work (*Werk*), and the Greek *ergon*, are derived from the Indo-Germanic stem, *uerg*, such that that which is real, or has reality (*Uirklichkeit*), that which works, is that



which has been *brought forth from its concealment* (Heidegger, 1977, 160)) the only pluralism which to my mind Levinas readily acknowledges, the only pluralism he is prepared to counter-sign, aside from that typified by the pluralistic metaphysic of *Totality and Infinity*, is the pluralism of the monotheistic faiths for whom the *pāgānus* has, more often than not, been something of a pariah, one to be converted to the truth, or worse, an idolater to be subjugated by the sword. After all, Levinas himself professes that, as he puts it, 'forty centuries of monotheism have had no other end in view than to liberate humanity' from its obsession with 'the petrifying effect of myths,' myths to which the pagan willingly assents (*ET* 40).

Within the work of Levinas, then, we witness a recrudescence of antipathy toward the 'pagan' other, a redoubling of that prejudice found throughout the history of monotheistic faith. Furthermore, if the 'essence of Judaism is not defined by any human borderlines,' as Levinas adverts, 'but from within' (the 'extra-historical' destiny of Israel' attests, Levinas will assert, to the 'permanent revelation of a supranational universality' (*OS* 62)), then is Judaism not guilty of a supreme form of self-possession, or 'sovereignty,' traits Levinas disclaims in *Otherwise than Being* (*OBBE* 99) for being symptomatic of the logic of the domicile? Certainly one may wonder whether a tradition such as Judaism, whose institution is generative in nature, generative that is, because qua tradition its development is ongoing, can define itself from within (where the 'individuals' who compose that tradition are engendered hetero-affectively) since the historicity determinate of tradition, when construed phenomenologically, is constituted precisely as the history of co-constitutive endeavour, where such endeavour reflects the complex interplay between the Other and the Same, the home and the alien, the *freund* and the *fremd*, conducted at the level of trans-cultural, inter-racial engagement. As Husserl intimates, the 'constitution of existence-sense' involves 'an Ego community,' an Ego community that in turn draws upon an intersubjective sphere of ownness' in relation to an alien sphere of ownness (*CM* §49 [137]). Levinas himself acknowledges that 'history is worked over by the ruptures of history' (*TI* 52). Might this not, then, include disruptions of Holy History? It is perhaps because Levinas lacks any 'philosophically' rigorous notion of community that he is unable to account convincingly for those relationships that take place on the periphery of one's home culture or tradition, a periphery at whose limit the traditions of that culture ultimately begin, rather than terminate, a limit at which difference is *elevated* and identity *bestowed*.

### § 30. *The culture of transcendence*

Despite proposing what he calls 'a culture of transcendence' (*EN* 185), a culture 'preceding politics' and affairs of State, Levinas does not demonstrate how, in the midst of this cultural space, the culture of proximity, no less, the other person preserves her ethnic, religious and racial heritage. For if the other accedes to the rank of Other (*Autrui*) if and when she is denuded of all cultural form, her alteriological status is clearly threatened by her identification with the trappings of culture. Yet significantly, both the 'Jew' and the 'pagan' retain their respective cultural identities in Levinas' work, and it is this identity that mediates the proto-ethical significance with which they are credited by Levinas. The staging of proto-ethical space is quite purposively rigged, it seems, the field of susceptibility doctored in consultation with those doctors of Talmudic science Levinas reveres.

Thus it is the erasure of cultural particularity that prefigures the opening of the dimension of proto-ethics (is phenomenology not, in its Husserlian guise, an emancipation from the sphere of brute fact through imaginative variation?), a space, to be sure, a non-geometric space, governed by religious determinants (Jew:Pagan::Holy:Sacred) between whose poles the field of proto-ethical transaction extends; determinants which, with Nietzsche, we might term 'the two sets of valuations' (Nietzsche, 1956, 185) whose opposition, and apposition, motivate the putatively non-allergic relation of the face-to-face. Let us be clear. For Levinas there can be no history of the face – no prosopography – since the face is juvenescent, youthful, and it is precisely this juvenescence that accounts for the importunate nature of the demands it visits upon the subject. The 'appearances' detailed by phenomenology are 'broken' by the 'youthful epiphany' of the face, a youth 'already past in its youth' (*OBBE* 90). Like the river in which Heraclitus is reported to have said one can but step only once, one may wonder whether one can one respond to the 'same' face twice and, furthermore, whether the aporia into which this question delivers us may be resolved. The subject that ages within the world, whose futurity is accomplished as senescence, is met by one whose sprightly mien defies their age. The calculations of the actuary cannot gauge the Other's worth. No empirical history or historiographical appraisal of the face is adequate to its anarchy, Levinas will insist. Moreover, the 'unlimited responsibility for another as an enucleation [*dénucléation*] of oneself' cannot be translated into 'history's concreteness' (*QA* 81). Indeed, historiography is subtended by hagiography, Levinas avers (*OBBE* 193, n.33), the one-for-the-other ante cedes the organisation of society and the time of its administration. The face does not possess a *Stamm*, base, or root, since it is concrete *a priori*, and literally without precedent.

Yet, the face Levinas assays bears a legacy, I would contend, for it signifies in a distinctly nuanced way (and there is no need to rehearse here the arguments of part one). The face does not merely interrupt the time of my recollection, interrupting the retentional activity by which the time of consciousness is marked, nor disturb the forward march of my being toward death (Dasein may 'use itself up' and thus 'reckon with' its time (*BT* §66 [333]) but *me voici* is expendable, it seems, by virtue of its  $\chi$ my being for-the-other). The face deduced by Levinas brokers its entry into the mundane order in no uncertain terms, signification is proscription, interdiction, mandates that are inflected with the mores of the culture in whose midst the face 'appears,' or rather, disappears. The facundity of Levinas' phenomenological descriptions ought not to divert our attention from what remains recondite within those descriptions themselves, from what besmirches the field of phenomenological explication with unsolicited positings, more often than not theological in nature. It is difficult to reconcile Levinas' rancour toward the 'pagan' and the 'sacred' – Levinas' position, i.e., the habituality of his Mitnagdism – with the Levinasism of his thought and the reception of his corpus among scholars.

Does the obloquy Levinas pours upon the 'pagan' not vitiate his arguments for the pre-history of the subject (*OBBE* 117), a self 'older than the ego' and 'prior to principles'? To be sure, the moment of susception is fissured diachronically such that the face impressed upon me dispossesses me of my self 'breaking up the *principle* of being in me' (*OBBE* 114) and casting me back to the hither side of my point of initiation. The ego, which, as Husserl intimates in the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*, 'constitutes himself for himself' in 'the unity of a history' (*CM* §37), is deposed. Yet this inversion of ἀρχή into anarchy, which purports to transcend 'being' (*OBBE* 117), by which, as we have seen, Levinas means the 'being' of the conatus, does not sublimate the energy of conation entirely, nor divest the space of proto-ethics of its influence.

The translation between the natural attitude and the contra-natural, ethical aptitude is incomplete. Arguably, the vestiges of conation are inscribed within the field of susceptibility like a trace, decussating the trace of the infinite that, according to Levinas, striates the opening of the present through which the face approaches. Indeed, does the 'trace of infinity' (*OBBE* 117) Levinas adduces not dissimulate the *legacy of the face*, and dissemble the heritability of its provocation? Again, is the face not provokable precisely because its appeal, and impressibility, attest to what Husserl would call 'a motivated course of particular constitutive performances' (*CM* §37), performances that are undeniably generative and gesture to the execution of what we have called generative *Sinngebungen*? Must we not speak, then, of *chiachrony* in this

regard, that is, the intersection, or chiasm, of the diachronic (infinite being is 'produced in several times,' we recall (TI 284)). The very infinity of the infinite whose trace Levinas describes, is accomplished, after all, as the inter-finition of ethico-phenomenological filiation: sense (*sens*) is disseminated and an ethical sediment laid down through repetition and frequentation. As Nietzsche explains in *The Genealogy of Morals*, 'vast tracts of ritual ethics' precede our world history 'as the truly determining history' (Nietzsche, 1956, 250). Is the responsible subject, like the *hyperanthropos* exhorted by Nietzsche, willed into being by the tradition that precedes it and engendered by the community that entertains its possibility; an instance then of cultural-religious 'free variation' that can only be the work of the Mitnagdic imagination?

If '*me voici*' is a genuinely generative 'production,' or 'creation,' subject to the laws of phenomenological phylogeny, then is Levinas not claiming to have resolved the problem broached by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*, the problem as the latter sees it, of 'what type of human being one ought to breed,' or 'ought to will' (Nietzsche, 1990a, 3), by presenting *me voici* as a veritable 'higher type,' albeit a type without genus and one altogether distinct from that 'heroic being that the State produces by its virile virtues' (TI 306). Indeed, does *me voici*, the self whose ipseity is defined by its suffering for others, not represent the culmination of what, in *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas will call Judaism's 'reaching out for the coming of the Messiah' (DF 88)? Has this 'reaching out' (*tendu vers la venue*) not motivated (and we deploy this term in keeping with its phenomenological importation) the field of proto-ethical comportment, and organized the schema (σχημα) of susception in such a way that the self is made susceptible to the face qua face, or dare we say it, engineered with the face in mind (ψυχή)? This would be a truly audacious form of social engineering, undergirded by the complex architectonic of Jewish thought.<sup>8</sup>

The 'triumph' of the messianic, perhaps akin to the victory of essence over fact in Husserl (?), the 'extreme vigilance of messianic consciousness' over world-historical time is a 'problem,' Levinas acknowledges, that 'exceeds the bounds' of *Totality and Infinity* (TI 285), as, no doubt, it also exceeds the borders of *Otherwise than Being*. It does so on two counts, because this triumph without triumphalism, this

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<sup>8</sup> Consider the following remarks by Husserl, for example. Philosophers, he states, are the 'heirs and cobearers of the direction of the of the will which pervades [philosophical] humanity; they have become this through a primal establishment which is at once a reestablishment [*Nachstiftung*] and a modification of the Greek primal establishment.' 'Genuine self-reflection,' Husserl continues, 'inhabits' the philosopher 'as a will coming *from* the will and *as* the will of his spiritual forefathers' (*Crisis* §15 [71]; emphasis added).

'faith without triumph' (*POO* 218), is dramatized generatively, and because the preservation of vigilance to which Levinas alludes, is the preserve of the Jewish community. A problem, therefore, to be addressed within the context of 'study,' a Levinasian synonym for the exegesis of the Talmud, and 'exegesis is spiritual life,' Levinas notes (*BVxi*). In *Textes Messianiques* (1963), a series of commentary upon commentary, charting the prominence of messianism within Talmudic literature, Levinas attempts to fix the meaning of the messianic in 'concrete terms' (*concrètement*). The 'Self as Self,' he avers, 'taking upon itself the whole suffering of the world, is designated solely by this role.' Thus designated, he continues, 'each person acts *as though* he were the Messiah' (*DF* 89-90; *DL* 130; emphasis added) 'Messianic sensibility' (*la sensibilité messianique*) is thus 'the very subjectivity of the subject' (*la subjectivité même du sujet*), Levinas continues, a sensibility, moreover, that is 'inseparable from the *knowledge* of being chosen' (*DF* 96; *DL* 138; emphasis added).

Such discourse on election rightly exceeds the remit of *Totality and Infinity* and the jurisdiction of *Otherwise than Being*, texts that pride themselves upon their phenomenological rigour and (apparent) theological neutrality. However, the issue of electability is central to Levinas' work and it is ultimately this concept, and more pointedly, its political and religious ramifications, that occasions the torsion between Levinas' 'confessional' and 'philosophical' publications. For while Levinas will radicalize the term, heightening its ethical signification, its deployment within his texts retains an intimate connection with Jewish particularism, even, as we have seen, within works otherwise 'philosophical' in orientation. The post-Holocaust predicament of Western Jewry informs Levinas' understanding of election and intensifies the acuity of his pronouncements. However, the electability of the Jew, and the privilege accorded Judaism by Levinas (the putative privilege of supporting the universe) are recurrent themes within Talmudic scholarship and Levinas' engagement of these themata can be seen to be in broad concinnity with Talmudic exegetical tradition. The question of 'Jewish' identity impels many of Levinas' Talmudic commentaries and the reader will undoubtedly note a thematic concern common to both genres of Levinasian thought here. Levinas conducts his disquisition of this problem throughout his writings, treating its instantiation and stratification at a subjective, religious and nationalistic level. Invariably, insights appurtenant to the constitution of the subject are apt to appear specious when taken as determinative of religious, racial or national identity, and, once again, it is the transit between these



topoi (and the unlicensed commerce between levels or strata) that undermines the authority of proto-ethical protocol.

For although Levinas will caution his Jewish audience against the dangers of particularism ('the notion of Israel in the Talmud must be separated from all particularism, except for that of election, he urges (*NGTT* 123)), he nevertheless promulgates the idea of what he calls a 'universalist particularism [*particularisme universaliste*]', a fusion of 'universal history' and a 'necessarily particularist messianism [*un messianisme nécessairement particulariste*]' (*DF* 96; *DL* 138; emphasis added). Terms proscribed within the context of Levinas' 'philosophical' work are, it seems, requisite to the description of Jewish identity. An identity confirmed by the 'certainty of the absolute's hold over man' (*DF* 174) and the knowledge of being chosen' (*DF* 96). Such certainty and knowledge, to be sure, the certainty and knowledge of finding oneself deposed, are imported into the field of phenomenological enquiry and furtively deposited there. Yet the Jewish legacy of which these terms admit, the legacy of a Judaic theological heritage, exceeds the limits (*déborde le cadre de*) of a strictly philosophical reflection, even one for which obstruction is πρώτη φιλοσοφία. Jewish particularism is universalised as proto-ethically normative. Furthermore, these notions are justified, or let us say substantiated, as it is crucially a matter of the subject expiating itself for others, through recourse to the shifting dialectic of rabbinical reasoning; reasoning which is itself sustained by the performance of 'ritual law' (*la loi rituelle*), upon whose basis ethical life is 'guaranteed' (*DF* 173; *DL* 243). This 'ethical life' (*la vie éthique*) is the self-same life propounded by Levinas in among other places, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, the life of diacony whose truth does not rest upon the 'acceptance of any dogmatic content' (*TI* 25), nor the 'certainty or uncertainty' of any 'positive theology' (*OBBE* 147).

However, if the electability of Jewish identity is predicated upon the Revelation at Sinai, if, that is, the 'whole of Jewish Law is commanded today, even though Mount Sinai belongs to the past,' and, what is more, 'the present exists only because there is Revelation' (*DF* 191), then the particularism Levinas defends does indeed depend for its legitimacy upon a theological postulate. This act of foundation laying (*Grundlegung*) we might say, founds the enterprise of proto-ethics, as intellectual intuition, for Husserl, is founded upon sensuous perception. Mount Sinai is less the *datum* of academic history than the *sedimentum* of Jewish mythography, a postulate that is both posited, so as to orient the sense of 'Holy History,' and deposited, drawing its constitutive force from a reserve of sedimented meaning which

functions, like the Husserlian object of sense perception, as an intentional guide for the elaboration of that very history.

### § 31. *Selection*

The particularism of Jewish identity vis-à-vis the nations (the 'gratuitous duty' of election) does not turn into an 'imperialist expansion that devours all those who deny it,' Levinas will maintain (*DF* 174). Yet are pronouncements of this sort not unduly optimistic? For are they not dashed by Levinas' assertion that the Jewish faith already includes, within the purview of its self-concept, the abolition of those differences that divide the 'Jew' from the 'Greek' and the 'barbarian,' and, what is more, as a necessary and indispensable moment of its accomplishment as a 'universalist particularism [*un particularisme universaliste*]' (*DF* 177)?<sup>9</sup> Can the Jewish faith be both tolerant of difference in its variegated forms ('from the beginning it bears the entire weight of all other men' (*DF* 173)) and denounce so called religions of the sacred 'as the essence of idolatry' (*RFA* 14)? After all, the noose bears the weight of the condemned with admirable disinterest. Thus while 'Jewish existence is itself an essential event of being,' a 'category of being,' no less (*DF* 183), the 'moral degeneracy' indicative of paganism (*DF* 174) is derided for being the '*obverse* of the Real,' '*Nothingness* condensed to mystery' (*DD* 141), mere 'sorcery' (*DD* 152).

Clearly, the disjunction accented here between the ordinances of tolerance and derogation suggests a breach in the figure of election by which the identity of the Jew/subject is defined. The work of Levinas is riven by this breach which transverses, and thus bridges, both his 'Talmudic' and 'philosophical' works. Arguably, it is this breach that delimits (and limits) the work that unfolds within its precincts. As such, this breach forms the peribolus of the work, I would contend. However, need one be hypocritical to at once denounce and affirm? To denounce is to affirm, one might add, since one must acknowledge the heterodox, or accept it as other, in order to repress and sublate it. Does Levinas not, as he puts it, 'embrace conjunctions of elements' that signify the break up of the subject in its constancy (*OBBE* 184)? And is it not rather this break up that breaches, and therefore demarks, the work in its totality, the breach, furthermore, by which the infinity that 'withstands the invasion of totality' is produced (*TI* 78)? To be sure, this apposition of terms is further complicated by the fact that the sheer inordinacy of my being for-the-other, the

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the words 'Jew' and 'humankind' are virtually synonymous for Levinas. Judaism is the subject for which humanity is the predicate, we are reliably informed (*DF* 50).

situation of the subject *qua me voici pour les autres*, is 'attenuated with hypocrisy as soon as it enters *my ears*' (OBBE 185). The enunciation of responsibility attenuates the 'saying' it articulates, since my testimony proceeds my susceptibility according to the diachronic logic in which the terms of Levinas' later work are set forth. This hypocrisy is itself denounced however, and denounced Levinas suggests, in accordance with the norms of enormity to which it defers, because my witness is one of pure disinterest. Moreover, as Levinas states in *Sur Maurice Blanchot* (1975), philosophy is 'marvellously hypocritical' because the language it deploys excites the very 'madness' over which it presides (PN 149; NP 42; translation altered).

Yet ought the hypocrisy Levinas condones, the hypocrisy which, with Llewelyn, we might term, 'hypoCritical,' since the distinctions called for by the Kantian Critiques, between, for example, rationality and sensibility, intellect and imagination, are subtended by the more thoroughly hypo-critical criticism of responsibility to and for others (Llewelyn, 2000, 212), to dissuade us from denouncing what is hypocritical in Levinas' work, if not sanctimonious? In Levinas' case, must we not distinguish between the method practised and the interpretation brought to bear upon that method during the course of its performance, and is it not to the spacing between the two that we ought to turn our *critical gaze*? For this spacing, or breach, demarcates the plot of proto-ethics, as, indeed, it circumscribes the field of phenomenological reflection by highlighting the difference between those ideas that merely pertain to pure phenomenology and the practice of that phenomenology itself (as the title of Husserl's masterwork confers). Of course, if this space commands our attention, it does so after the fashion of the face Levinas describes because it is the place where the face, to which Levinas' thought is oriented, is fashioned and produced, the 'heart of a chiasmus' (like that at which, according to Levinas, his thought and that of Derrida meet (WO 8)) between the said, the unsaid interwoven with it, and the saying that exceeds it. Thus, while Levinas may champion the denunciation of hypocrisy entailed by the crisis into which one is thrown by the other person (OBBE 185) – one is posited as deposed – and in turn laud the 'excellence' of those civilizations that exhibit 'a high degree of universality,' that is to say, as he puts it, those civilizations whose 'generosity lacks hypocrisy' (DF 52), he remains consistently vituperative in his treatment of the 'pagan,' the 'polytheistic' and the 'mythological,' a position that is hardly generous and not a little perfidious.

Here, then, we discern a conceptual opposition at work within the work of Levinas that structures the organisation of his texts through the privilege it accords to one term (Jew) above another (Pagan). These terms circulate between the self-styled

'confessional' and 'philosophical' works as the termini of and for argumentation, although Jewish explicata are typically erased from the 'philosophical' texts, leaving only the trace of their influence, or offset as distant horizons whose motivation is felt through the force they exert upon certain judgments delivered within those texts. Now, phenomenology may be, as Husserl states, 'the science having the unique function of effecting the criticism of all others and, at the same time, of itself' (*Id* §62), a science that probes beneath the empirical subsoil of the natural attitude to plumb its eidetic depths, an enterprise that is eminently fossorial in character. However, despite what we might term the meta-critique (or hyper-critique) Levinas incorporates into the structure of *Otherwise than Being* (can the struggle against evil 'avoid the institution of violence out of this very struggle,' Levinas wonders; does 'the war perpetuate that which it is called to make disappear' and 'consecrate war and its virile virtues in good conscience?' he asks (*OBBE* 177)) do we not have cause to question, once again, the ease with which Levinas' analysis of identity moves between a consideration of the matrix of proto-ethical susception and the nexus of cultural, religious and political relations it purportedly substructures? How, other than by what Husserl would term an apperceptive expansion (*Erweiterung*) of the subject's ethically reconfigured *Nahsphäre* does Levinas legitimate this shift in emphasis, and what authorizes this translation between levels or strata of signification?

Ultimately, of course, it is the face itself that authorizes this transfer of sense. Yet unless the skin (*peau*) behind which, according to Levinas, I am ill at ease (*être mal dans sa peau*) is epicritical, and thus discriminant in its very passivity, the face that faces me, summoning me to 'respond with responsibility' to its plight (*OBBE* 185), is always already, as intimated earlier, singularly-plural. Adapting Husserl, one might say that even what is straightforwardly susceptible is 'communalized' (*Crisis* §47 [163]). Therefore, even that which calls each 'chosen one' to 'leave in his turn' the 'concept of the ego' and 'its extension in the people' (*OBBE* 185), must appeal to the self-evidences of co-constitutive endeavour and draw upon the legacy of co-historization.

But is it not precisely to the self-evidence of creaturalty (*la créaturalité*) and the testimony of the single one that Levinas turns in order to validate the modification of sense by which the-one-for-the-other of substitution is accomplished corporately as the (s)election of the Jewish people by God? Following the Husserl of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, but inflecting the sense of critique found in that late Husserlian text with an ethical valence, one might say that Levinas regards the 'total historical complex' as a 'personal one,' and the 'historical

task' of the philosopher as '*personally* his own' (*Crisis* §15; emphasis added). This task develops its own history, it becomes historical, through its exercise and implementation. However its implementation is at once its embodiment qua *me voici*, such that the 'infinite tasks [*unendliche Aufgaben*]' (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 289), toward which philosophy is oriented in the elaboration of its 'destiny,' assume the prospect of the 'everywhere of faces [*le de-partout des visages*]' that put me into question (*OBBE* 197 n.22; *AE* 188 n.1).

If phenomenology, in its Husserlian determination, is egology (the scientific explication of the universe of sense appurtenant to the Ego, the Ego that I am, the Ego of which I have *original* evidence), then proto-ethics is likewise, or more accurately, otherwise (*autrement*), the exhibition of the creature in its creaturality, the bringing to light, as senescence, of the *pre-originary an-archy of susception*. Arguably Levinas reduces the 'quite *personal* responsibility [*Die ganz persönliche Verantwortung*]' in which Husserl discerns the role of the philosopher as 'functionary of mankind [*Funktionäre der Menschheit*]' (*Crisis* §7), to its proto-ethical signification. Thus, the *τέλος* which according to Husserl was 'inborn' in European humanity at the 'birth of Greek philosophy,' the entelechy of a civilization with a 'latent orientation toward reason' (*Crisis* §6), finds expression in the work of Levinas as the idea of the infinite-in-me.

One may wonder, though, whether this 'idea,' the entelechy of the creature, or the awakening of the subject to itself, does not attest, through the manner of its articulation, to the community of its motivation, and therefore to its Mitnagdic provenance. Significantly, Levinas will note that for Husserl 'the *sedimentation of a certain history* in the thinking Ego' is, as he expresses it, 'necessary in order for the representation of space to be formed' (*PHH* 132; emphasis added), an insight equally applicable, I would insist, to the delimitation of ethical space and the *espacement* of its basic terms. With Husserl, then, we might conclude this chapter by suggesting that problems of 'genesis [*Generativität*]' are, indeed, problems of 'transcendental historicity [*transzendentalen Geschichtlich Keit*]' (*Crisis* §55), whether such genesis is construed phenomenologically or proto-ethically.



## 6. EXECRATION

In setting forth what follows, I have been led to further complicate the relationship between Levinas' proto-ethical insight and the religious and cultural exempla to which he appeals to illustrate that insight. Within the framework of this relationship and the problems raised by it, I will lay claim to the idea that 'disenchantment' (*désenchantement*) is the *work of ethics*, that which the work of Levinas endeavours to effect through its expurgation of myth (*mythe*), and eradication of the sacred (*le sacré*), from the field of proto-ethical negotiation. My aims in this chapter are twofold, therefore. Firstly, to situate Levinas' elaboration of 'myth' in relation to both the 'philosophical' and 'Hebraic' currents of his thought, in order to bring into focus his understanding of demythologization and to exhibit his presentation of 'holiness' (*sainteté*) upon this basis. Secondly, to accent the tension between exegetical custom and proto-ethical risk, which, I believe, obtains throughout the work of Levinas and limits the provocation of the face he details. I will conclude by arguing for what I have called a 'pagan' attestation within the work of Levinas. A proposal consonant with the directives of ethical metaphysics, if not with the legislation of its rule (ἀρχή).

### § 32. *Mere marginalia*

Levinas would encourage his readers to be vigilant, lest they be duped by his proposals. We begin this chapter, then, by posing a question and underscoring a problem. Is my bearing of another not my bringing that other to birth (portage is *partage*, we recall), and, moreover, my *bringing the other to birth as a face*? This is a labour for which generations of 'Jews,' if we are to accept Levinas' definition of Judaism, have toiled, the pole of infinity toward which they have aspired longingly; the goal they have desiredχDesired? The face Levinas assays is born(e) as idea (it is engendered notionally, let us say) from the struggle of what Husserl would call, the 'generations of philosophers' who 'are the bearers of its spiritual development' (*Crisis* 339), and what Levinas would term, a 'drama between philosophers' (*OBBE* 20). The face is produced through exegesis because *something like the face* (and here the importance of the trope in Levinas cannot be underestimated) commands attention and inspires the discipline of the philosophyχsage, the φιλόσοφος and the *chakham*.

Yet the 'production' (*Leistung*) of the face, together with its heritability, need not be grounds to dismiss its provocation, nor challenge its injunctive force, but rather

to question its instantiation in the figure of the face Levinas outlines and the σῆμα to which he appeals. For while, as Husserl notes in the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*, ‘the beginning phenomenologist is *bound involuntarily* by the circumstance that he takes himself as his initial example’ (CM §37 [110]), a predicament from which Levinas will deduce the ‘persecution’ (*persécution*) of the hostage-subject, and Levinas himself concedes that the subject he ‘universalizes’ in his work (‘I universalise myself’) belongs to ‘generation and corruption’ (OBBE 126), is it not the case that for Levinas the community of Mitnagdic Jews remains the ‘Zero-member’ (*Nullglied*) of the human community per se? To be sure, in *Totality and Infinity* it is filiation that is seen to be integral to election (‘each son of the father is the unique son, the chosen son,’ Levinas will urge (TI 279)). Transposed thus to the level of ‘culture,’ all religio-racial ‘types’ ought, at least according to the thread (*fil*s) of this filial logic, to be awarded equal status, a status reflecting their respective prominence within the cultural *Nahsphären* in which they hold sway constitutively. A proposal in direct agreement with the pluralistic metaphysic that governs *Totality and Infinity*.

In the generative surge towards the face, arguably a putsch of sorts, do many not suffer under the violence of this reduction? After all, in Husserl the actuality of cognition is judged and preceded by the possibility of cognition. Empirical actuality is judged according to the eidetic laws that precede it (*Id* §79). For Levinas, similarly, as we noted earlier, the ‘norms of the absolute,’ norms which are putatively ‘not embarked in history and culture’ make it possible to judge cultures (*MS* 59). Has an impasse not been reached here and a limit breached? Certainly, Levinas does judge cultures and traditions of thought foreign to his own, and often less than favourably. His judgement is based, moreover, upon evidence that is at best desultory, and at worst, prejudicial. In his *Ideas* of 1913, Husserl repeatedly warned against conflating the phenomenological doctrine of essences with the actual existence of those noetic processes upon which the phenomenologist bases his or her eidetic findings (*Id* §79). By the *Crisis*, however, and held enthralled by the possibility of a ‘socially and generatively united civilization [*generative und social verbundenen Menschheiten*]’ (*Crisis* §6), a civilization for whom the ‘historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason’ would be its unique accomplishment (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 299), Husserl had himself succumb to the dangers of what elsewhere in the *Crisis* he called ‘mythical construction [*mythisch zu Konstruieren*]’ (*Crisis* §42). For by presenting the trajectory of reason in ‘European’ terms, and by differentiating between a ‘European’ humanity in which ‘an absolute idea’ is ‘inborn,’ and mere ‘empirical anthropological types like “China” or “India”’ (*Crisis* §6), Husserl had imported speculative and evidentially

invalid positings into the field of phenomenological self-reflection. Of course, Husserl had qualified such remarks noting that 'it is a mistake' and 'a falsification of their sense' to 'interpret India, Babylonia [and] China, in a European way' (*Crisis*, Appendix I, 284-5). Yet, his belief that 'the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning,' one, moreover, that is 'proper to the sense,' rather than to 'the historical non-sense of the world,' remains at best conjectural, if not peremptory.

As a thinker of his time, Levinas' is also prone to such 'reasoning,' and certainly Levinas' confidence in the rationality of history is no less Hesperian in outlook than that of Husserl. Take the following statement from *Totality and Infinity*, for example, in which Levinas underscores the fact that, as he sees it, 'Greek metaphysics conceived the Good as separate from the totality of essences,' and in this way 'caught sight of a structure such that the totality could admit of a beyond,' an achievement, Levinas will stress, realized '*without any contribution from an alleged Oriental thought*' (TI 102; emphasis added). Again, then, it is toward that 'essence *without admixture*' (DD 141) that Levinas *orients* his thought. Whether that essence be called 'Spirit,' in which case it is purportedly beyond essence, or 'History,' the situs in which the latter is revealed. Indeed, what Levinas ventures to call the *beyond essence* is borne by the 'history of the West' in its 'margins' (*dans ses marges*), margins in which Levinas will discern the 'trace of events' whose signification is not exhausted in the assimilating movement of ontology (OBBE 178; AE 273).

But does this thought, which summons us to the margins of Western intellectual history, not relegate, as mere marginalia, those histories extruded from the accord between 'Athens' and 'Jerusalem' of which it is both the product and the effect? In support of this suggestion one might cite Levinas himself when, in an interview in 1991, he confides that 'although it is a dangerous thing to say publicly, humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks.' The 'rest,' he continues, 'all the exotic – is dance' (Mortley, 1991, 18). It is because Levinas understands ethics as the 'secularization of the sacred' (TIS 163) and, consequently, Western rationality as the 'secularization of idolatry' (TIS 164), that he feels justified in disclaiming the thought of those peoples who fall outside the reaches of this history. A history that despite its pretensions otherwise, appears increasingly totalitarian in character. No doubt a chilling proposition upon which to reflect, although one likely to be dismissed as idle cavillation by those loyal to the Levinasian 'cause.' Can Levinas' thought sustain such criticism? More pointedly, can it afford not to? Let us be clear. Our remarks do not conspire towards contumacy (at least they do not oppose the authority of the face),

rather it is the sententious nature of Levinas' claims and, furthermore, the manner in which the elision of cultural difference is dissimulated under the figure of the face (and in the name of its sanctity) that arouse our suspicion.

The suggestion that non Western cultures lack the 'cultural' credentials exhibited by their Graeco-Judaic (JewXGreek), or 'European,' counterparts is, to be sure, already prefigured in Heidegger. Dasein may be of the opinion, we recall, that 'understanding the most alien cultures and "synthesizing" them with one's own may lead to Dasein's becoming for the first time thoroughly and genuinely enlightened about itself.' To think thus, Heidegger maintains, is to 'tranquilize' and deaden one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being, since to surrender to the temptation to compare and contrast oneself with others is nothing short of 'alienation' (*Entfremdung*) (*BT* §38 [178]). Why this should be so is perhaps justified within the context of the *Daseinsanalytik*, where such 'curiosity' is deemed a hindrance to one's becoming visible to oneself in the questionability of one's Being. However, the cultural myopia from which Levinas suffers cannot be so readily condoned, and the self-evidences upon which he bases his judgement are, what we might with Husserl deem to be, 'no better than an appeal to an oracle' (*Crisis* §55 [189]). Of course, Levinas would insist that he, like Heidegger before him, does not seek to promulgate a 'philosophy of culture' (*BT* §38 [178]), but rather to address the transcendental conditions of sociality and account for their incidence. Yet to deride secular thought as a 'godless theology that stirs in the soul of unbelievers' (*SC* 107), while censuring all forms of religious expression that centre upon the 'sacred,' is to affirm the cultural primacy of one's own tradition.

How, we may ask, has the 'outbreak of theoretical attitude' (*Crisis*, Appendix 1, 285), which, according to Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas, first broke forth in Greece to 'dethrone' myth and put opinion to rest (*PII* 48), been constrained by Hebraic imperatives? How has this outbreak (*Einbruch*) been contained and its virulence managed by Mitnagdic directives? Yes, Husserl will speak of limiting the universality of the *epochē* in order to delimit the field of phenomenological enquiry more precisely (*Id* §110). However, might we not question the saliency of Levinas' privileging of Judaism? Unlike the religions of 'Australia,' 'Africa' and 'Asia,' the 'God of the Jews is not the survivor of mythical gods,' Levinas will confer (*RFA* 14). Nor has Judaism, again unlike the religions of Africa, Asia, and Australia, 'evolved out of enthusiasm for the sacred,' he will charge (*RFA* 14). A notion one might wish to contest. It seems then, that the 'de-structuring' of cultures (*BVI* 211n.12) in which Levinas engages, draws upon prejudices deeply entrenched within Mitnagdic culture.

These prejudices inform his interpretation of religious beliefs and practices alien to his own.

Levinas may wish to 'decharm' the sacred (*RFA* 14) but has he successfully liberated himself from what Heidegger would term 'those idols everyone has, and to which they are wont to go cringing' (Heidegger, 1996 [1929], 110)? To what extent is the Hebraic God simply one more 'god' to be freed from the distorting context of its myth? According to Levinas, the Hebraic scriptures require *darchenov* (exegesis) and solicit strict attention. But do the texts of other faiths not warrant similar exegetical care? How is it, one may ask, that 'whatever the origin' of Hebraic texts 'they are authentic by virtue of their internal significance' (*BTW* 196), where those of heterodox religious traditions are purportedly not? Surely if 'one cannot refute the [Jewish] Scriptures without knowing how to read them' (*MI* 53), one cannot, by the same principle, refute those of other religious traditions either. But of course, it is not a matter of principle (ἀρχή), Levinas assures us.

To argue thus, Levinas would no doubt contend, would be to argue in favour of demythologization, an exegetical policy implemented with considerable assiduity by the Talmudic scholars of Levinas' native Lithuania (for whom 'there was a demythologizing texts' and also 'a demythologizing of what was already demythologized' (*JP* 240)). Is it not then a question of limitation, of demarcating the limits of demythologization and curtailing its enterprise? How does the *chakham*, sage, or scholar, regulate this process and moderate its exercise? Levinas proffers the following by way of clarification, relating the Greek and Jewish currents of his thought:

[T]he beauty of Greece must dwell in the tents of Shem; the language of deciphering. It demystifies. It demythicizes. It depoeticizes as well. Greek is prose, the prose of commentary, of exegesis, of hermeneutics...but also the language that "demetaphorizes" metaphors, conceptualises them, even if it must always begin anew. One must always demetaphorize the very metaphors by which one has just demetaphorized the metaphors *and wring eloquence's neck* (*TS* 53).

Despite the fact that Levinas cites the poet Verlaine approvingly here (a crapulent of some renown and confrère of the equally debauched Rimbaud, to whom Levinas appeals at crucial moments throughout his oeuvre<sup>1</sup>) it is the sober vigilance of the exegete that is to be pursued and not the licentiousness of the poet, against which the

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<sup>1</sup> References to the poet Rimbaud (1854-1891) abound in Levinas' work. For the most prominent, see: *EE* 59; *TI* 33; *S* 92.



latter is on guard. It is quite beyond the scope of the present investigation to assess the extent to which Levinas might be said to have 'demetaphorized' the metaphors that are operative in his own work (one thinks of the recurrent root motif, for example). However, it is clear that the intention is there to do so, even if such *intentio* often manifests itself as the desire to extrude the 'pagan,' 'sacred,' 'numinous,' and 'mystical' from the remit of phenomenological explication.

If the Hebraic is to *accommodate* the Greek (and one wonders whether Levinas has 'demetaphorized' this figure of dwelling sufficiently), if, that is, the two are to form an alliance and collude in the demythicization of myth, then ought one not to situate myth (μῦθος) against the horizons of its signification and determine its sense precisely. That is, ought one not to return to myth its history? To be sure, this would sharpen the acuity of Levinas' analysis and lend greater cogency to his claims. His failure to define myth adequately then, must be seen as symptomatic either of a failure on his part to grant myth the academic credibility it deserves, or a more general reluctance to acknowledge the mythical elements within his own thought.

This is perhaps hardly surprising given the influence of Franz Rosenzweig upon the development of Levinas' thinking. In *The Star of Redemption* (a work, as Levinas informs us in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* 'too often present in this book [*Totality and Infinity*] to be cited' (TI 28)) Rosenzweig had denounced myth and denigrated the religious traditions of Asia; and this with nothing more than a scant knowledge of the traditions in question. Indeed, many of Levinas' remarks concerning the above themes resemble those of statements advanced by Rosenzweig in *The Star of Redemption*. Rosenzweig, for example, will conceptualise myth as 'a life that knows nothing above and nothing beneath itself,' a life 'that constantly returns to itself' (Rosenzweig, 1985, 34). Similarly, he will opine that 'the living "gods of Greece" were worthier opponents of the living God than the phantoms of the Asiatic Orient,' and this because 'the deities of China as of India are massive structures made from the monoliths of primeval time which still protrude into our own times in the cults of "primitives"' (Rosenzweig, 1985, 35). Moreover, these 'deities,' Rosenzweig avers, 'a term favored by all those who flee the face of the living God for the mists of abstraction,' are little more than 'retrogressions into the elemental' (Rosenzweig, 1985, 36). A suggestion altogether consonant with Levinas' insistence that 'the nocturnal prolongation of the element is the reign of mythical gods,' 'faceless gods' to whom 'one does not speak' (TI 142). In short, Rosenzweig continues, 'it is the lot of the adherents of Buddha and Lao-tzu alike that a luxuriant heathenism overtakes the adamantine monoliths of its *non-ideas*' (Rosenzweig, 1985, 37).

Rosenzweig's appraisal of 'Asiatic' thought is less than charitable, and his presentation of myth far from instructive. His reproof of what he calls 'paganism' (a term beneath which he subsumes the religions of the 'Orient' and the 'mythological thought' of the Ancient Near East, Europe and Greece) for being, as he puts it, 'metaethical,' could not be closer to Levinas in this regard (Rosenzweig, 1985, 392). Levinas, we recall, had identified the 'metaphysical relation' (the face-to-face) with the 'dawn of a humanity without myths' (*TI* 77). Yet one may again wonder whether such a 'dawn' does not preclude the Hebraism that is its emissary, nor announce its demise or further transformation. How does the 'founding myth' of Judaism, the 'trauma of the "bondage in the land of Egypt" which marks the Bible and the liturgy of Judaism' (*DJ* 4), survive this dawn in which  $\mu\hat{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\varsigma$  terminates? Do Judaic myths resonate with a meaning which guarantees their perpetuity in ways non-Judaic myths (the myths of 'spiritually mediocre people' (*SWAB* 138)) do not? When does the hagiography of the *one-for-the-other* (*OBBE* 193n.33) become mythography, and the use of hyperbole, mythomania?

### § 33. *The archaic environment of myth*

Richard Cohen, stalwart Levinasian and Levinas scholar, has consistently championed Levinas' philosophy, including the latter's defamation of myth. Cohen will thus conclude that:

Levinas does not fight myth with myth, superstition with superstition. Rather, in what seems like myth, in what could be misunderstood as myth, he understands the human by means of exegesis. It is a great difference (Cohen, 2001, 230).

While one might concur with Cohen that something like the distinction he moots here between myth and exegesis prevails within the work of Levinas, his engagement with Levinas tends, as Critchley might say, to confine itself to 'commentary' and at its worst, 'homage' (Critchley, 2004, 172). Not only does Cohen, in my opinion, ignore the subtle nuances of mythopoeic thought, but like Levinas himself, he refuses to see in myth anything but profligacy and temulence:

The enemy of Judaism, the enemy of all ethical monotheism, and the enemy of genuine reason, then, would be myth, mythological thinking, mythologized life (Cohen, 2001, 227).

Judaism and ethical monotheism therefore oppose myth, Cohen adverts:

by loving truth associated with virtue, by articulating and supporting *a sober mentality*, a clearheadedness, an ethical alertness anathema to any submergence, participation, or *intoxication in mythic consciousness*. In contrast to the high demands of philosophy and Judaism, the allure of myth represents a violence, the return to an animal vitality that violates the moral stature, the humanity of the human, the moral "election" of the singular one. In a word, myth is irresponsible (Cohen, 2001, 339).

Principally Levinas' distrust of myth must, I believe, be understood within the context of his Jewry, and to this end Cohen has correctly accented this aspect of Levinas' thought (although he has been reluctant to admonish the latter where he arguably ought to have done so). To summarise Levinas' position here one might situate his pronouncements concerning μῦθος in the following manner. Broadly speaking Levinas' denunciation of myth is a reaction, an 'allergy,' one could say (motivated in part by Mitnagdic proclivities), against Nazism, psychoanalysis, and what he will call the 'whole religious revival' (*PU* 101), whether within departments of sociology and anthropology, or among the youth of his day, centred around non-Western religious traditions. Wherever myth is targeted for reproach by Levinas, these themata are either explicitly, or tacitly, posited by him and held to account in various ways.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly Levinas himself is beyond reproach for his excoriation of Nazism. However, his readiness to deduce a complicity between Nazi ideology, the religions of Asia, Africa and Australasia, and the practice of psychoanalysis, is tendentious to say the least:

The renewal of mythology, the elevation of myth to the rank of superior thought by secular thinkers ... conveys not a broadening of reason, but a reversion to primitive mentality pure and simple. This is a nostalgia which is perhaps explained by the insufficiency of technical reason and the catastrophes it has unleashed. But is monotheistic civilization incapable of responding to this crisis by an orientation liberated from the horrors of myths, the confusion of thought they produce and the acts of cruelty they perpetuate in social customs? (*LB* 51)

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<sup>2</sup> In the essay 'Jean Lacroix: Philosophy and Religion (1971), for example, Levinas confers his feelings for psychoanalysis thus: 'By a strange privilege, some Olympian myths have resisted de-mythification, and, like the myth of Oedipus, preside over the process, suggesting new dimensions for reflection and providing "food for thought."' The reason for Levinas' discomfort, though, is that with the resurgence of 'mythology' one 'no longer focuses on the exegesis of the Scriptures: one studies their genesis' (*JL* 82). Levinas will not credit that within his own work certain motifs enjoy an equally 'strange privilege' that appears to absolve them from critique and closer scrutiny. Again, in the essay 'The Ego and the Totality' (1954), Levinas will write 'psychoanalysis consists in a predilection for some fundamental, but elementary, fables... That they have been collected from among the remnants of the most diverse civilizations and called myths adds nothing to their worth as clarifying ideas, and at most evinces a return to mythologies' (*ET* 40). Levinas' thinking on these issues is, I believe, fundamentally confused.

The crisis to which 'monotheism' must respond is ambiguously represented here. There can be little doubt, of course, that the Shoah is foremost in Levinas' mind. However, the precise connection between the Holocaust and the rise of secularism is poorly adumbrated by Levinas. For instance, Levinas will argue that 'technology as secularisation is destructive of pagan gods,' and consequently, contra Heidegger, that 'secularising technology figures in the progress of the human spirit' (*TIS* 166). Similarly, he will contend that disenchantment with the effects of this process of secularisation has 'nourished a nostalgia for *outdated* and *retrograde* forms' of religiosity (*LB* 51). Yet Levinas does not provide the explication necessary to consolidate his proposals, which are stated rather glibly without recourse to the historical, sociological and ethnographic data required to substantiate them fully.

Where Levinas strays from the remit of 'ethical metaphysics' his pronouncements seemed strained. The register of works such as *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, is poorly suited to rehearsing the complexities of social change. Levinas' drash of nineteenth and twentieth century (Western) cultural history is inadequate to its subject matter and typically specious in its execution of detail. Once again, I believe, this attests to the difficulty, and ultimate failure, of Levinas' thought to negotiate the passage (or make the transition) between proto-ethics and what we might call politics. Where a slippage between these 'regions' of enquiry does occur, Levinas' thinking, like the subject (*le sujet*) whose recurrence he charts, might be said to be out-of-step with its time, and out-of-step with the 'saraband of innumerable and equivalent cultures' (*MS* 58) he disregards (while being, as it were, very much *of its time*). This thinking of and after the Other is thus out-of-place, since the place to which it is called, one might suggest, is the *interface between proto-ethics and politics*. This is a limit Levinas thinks in the figure of the third party (*le tiers*) only to obviate the problem of how tertial space is delimited positively.

To be sure, the 'Cultures' Levinas would have us judge, the 'Cultures' it is possible to judge *on the basis of morality* (*MS* 59), are, should we take seriously the majuscular "C" with which Levinas often spells the word 'culture' (the essay 'Meaning and Sense' being no exception), those 'Cultures' of Fascism, the presentiment and memory of which, as Levinas himself repeatedly tells us, have informed the subject matter of his work.<sup>3</sup> Of course, if philosophy is to be, so to speak, theriacal against the rancour of Fascism, then it must interrogate the

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to professor John Llewelyn for drawing my attention to this important distinction.

preconditions (*préalables*) of such movements and investigate their genesis.<sup>4</sup> Basing one's suspicion of non-Western cultures upon questionable anthropology (Lévy-Bruhl), the conflation of Maoism with Taoism, and the presumption that *ideologically* Nazism is concordant with the religions of Asia, Africa and Australia (not to mention the appreciation of art (RS 12)) is ill advised however, and certainly of dubious scholarly worth. Indeed, the notion that the confluence of Greek and Hebraic thought gives rise to a history characterized by the expurgation of μῦθος; that is, a history of demythologization, is no less mythical than the myth it would debar and reflects a shift in symbolic order rather than the elision of myth.

Equally mythical, one might contend, is the claim Derrida ventures at the close of 'Violence and Metaphysics,' although it is a claim that is self-consciously fabulous, that 'we live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek,' a difference, Derrida continues, 'which is perhaps the unity of what is called history' (Derrida, 1978, 151). Yet, if we live 'in and of difference,' as Derrida adverts, and it may be that we live *of* difference as we live *from* the nutriments the earth provides, then the unity of what perhaps might be called history (Holy or otherwise) is already one of disunity and dissension. Arguably the difference between the 'Jew' and the 'Greek,' the difference by which they are united, is their difference from the 'pagan' and the 'Barbarian' (the βαρβάρικος is, after all, the non-Greek, and the pāgānus the non Jew, Christian or Muslim), a difference all too apparent in the effort of the former to suppress the latter and to efface the evidence of their incidence. The world, whose 'rending' (*déchirement*) Levinas will attribute to 'both the philosophers and the prophets [*à la fois aux philosophes et aux prophètes*]' (TI 24; Tel 9; emphasis added), is at once a world rent by forces whose provenance cannot be traced back to either 'Athens' or 'Jerusalem' and the myths in which their significance is encoded.

Levinas' appeal to 'Holy History' draws upon a narrative which recounts the emergence of Israel as a nation or a people privileged by 'God' and thus defers to myth for its authority. Authority upon which Levinas will in turn base his derogation of the pagan and the mythological. Levinas' disavowal of μῦθος, and antipathy toward the pagan, is itself informed by myth. As such, it is susceptible to the same processes of demythologization and mundification to which Levinas will have us

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<sup>4</sup> That philosophy should be theriacal, is perhaps confirmed by the following statement from Levinas (we would also do well to recall that the Hebrew word *Shoah*, means 'pit' or 'darkness'). Hence Levinas writes: 'but the death of the starving children *thrusts us into the snake pit*, into places that are no longer places, into places one cannot forget, but that do not succeed in placing themselves in memory, in organizing themselves in the form of memories. We have known such pits in this century!' (BM 85).



expose the 'anti-Scriptures' (*PII* 53) of paganism and the symbolism of psychoanalysis. If 'Jewish identity' is, as Levinas maintains inscribed in the 'Scriptures' of Judaism (*MI* 53), then along with it the identity of the pagan is also inscribed and laid down as invariant. Yet, if 'a loss of Jewish identity' is called for in order that this identity be renewed (*MI* 51), one may have to disburden the pagan of their identity *as* a pagan to ensure that this ancient correspondence between 'Jew' and 'pagan' is preserved. To do so, however, is to challenge the invariance of these very terms and to destabilize the narratives from which they derive their sense.

Beyond the cityscapes (Athens/Jerusalem) between which Levinas would have us situate the origin (ἀρχή) of that enterprise he calls ethics, from a region that can only be described as rural or wild (the best place, then, for the 'wild barbarian character of alterity' (*TRA* 347)), does the face of one extruded from this political assembly not call the history that is its work to account, and therefore preside over the auspication of another history; a history perhaps less 'Holy' and more terrene in outlook? No doubt, as Jean-Luc Nancy avers, 'concentrated within the idea of myth is perhaps the entire pretension on the part of the West to appropriate its own origin' such that it might 'at last identify itself' (Nancy, 1991, 46). In Levinas, the suspension or suppression of μῦθος is executed as a reduction of sorts in order that the face might be released from the archaic environment of its birth. If the face falls under sense, that is, if it is delivered to sense, then the media of its delivery (philosophical discourse, scripture, symbol) must undergo deconstruction.

However, if the face is to function as ἀρχή, rendering all approach to it anarchic, then by default, any narrative that would seek to justify the authority of its pronouncements through a retrieval, as Nancy suggests, of its origin, and by way of the repression of myth, is self refuting and ultimately fictive, since the principium to which it appeals to corroborate its claims by necessity transcends the terms in which it is proposed. Further, if the space of ethics 'defies myth in which tales about the origin of the world are fixed, tales which already unfold in the world and among its inhabitants,' as Levinas argues (*OBBE* 177), then it is a space that persists not in lieu of myth, but rather in that (non)place, and at that moment, when myth most readily asserts itself, when it attempts to repress its seity and deny its continuing prevalence. It is because, Levinas suggests, 'myth dictates to us the *fait accompli* [and] the constraint of custom and land' that it must be overcome (*RIJT* 142).

Yet the determinants of ethical space, at least the space Levinas deduces, remain no less fixed (and Levinas no less obdurate in his views) than those identities

which, he insists, are *enshrined in myth*. Aping Levinas, himself imitating Derrida, one might say, in a chiasmus of sorts, that to demythologize is to mythologize still.<sup>5</sup> Myth (μῦθος) like wonder (θαυμάζειν) does not then reach a terminus in knowledge, but undergoes what we might call a crisis in and as critique; or, in the case of Levinas, as hypocrisy or hypo-critique (TI 24; OBBE 185).

In *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo provides the following reflection upon the jurisdiction and scope of demythologization. He writes:

To demythologize the demythologization does not mean to restore the rights of myth, if only because amongst the myths we recognize as legitimate is that of reason and its progression. Demythologization, or the idea of history as the emancipation of reason, is not at all easy to exorcize ... If we wish to be faithful to our historical experience, we have to recognize that once demythologization has been exposed as a myth; our relation to myth does not return as naïve as before, but remains marked by this experience (Vattimo, 1992, 40).

Levinas' thought is marked by the awareness that within myth demythologization occurs as the interruption of myth. The myth he acknowledges as injunctive sets myth and history apart while placing that by which history is oriented beyond history (TI 23). Myth is designated as myth through recourse to the (hi)story of the decline in the power of mythology. The face toward which the thought of Levinas is directed interrupts the history that would recount its legacy because qua face the face signifies as ordinance and word, a situation attested to by the 'fact' that it is the attestation of testimony, according to Levinas, through which the authority of the face is revealed (TDTT 105). A situation once again, that draws philosophy back into the element of myth it would aspire to surpass.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the element of μῦθος differs markedly, or so Levinas will contend, from the 'essential *dimension* of interpretation' in which the 'prophetic essence' of this revelation becomes 'lived experience' (CTI 64; emphasis added). It does so because interpretation, understood in terms of exegesis, breaks with the immediacy of μῦθος, disturbing the immanence of its reign.

If one's attestation of the face is called forth upon the basis of exegesis as 'the very locus of response' (CTI 64) to the textual enciphering of the face's provocation, if, that is, like Dasein who in a state of resolute anticipation is 'ready for anxiety' (BT §60 [297]), one is *rendered ready for the face exegetically*, then susceptibility to and

<sup>5</sup> See: (Derrida, 1978, 150); and Levinas (GP 148).

<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps of interest to note that, according to the *Oxford Greek-English Lexicon*, the root of μῦθος is derived from μῦ, which connotes *muttering* and is suggestive of protestation; an utterance that conveys unbridled emotion, passion, πάθος.

for the face is likewise predetermined by exegetical activity, activity which thus undercuts the putatively pure passivity of susception itself. What I have termed the epicriticality of the flesh, is henceforth occasioned exegetically (and throughout his work does Levinas not, in many respects, endeavour to provide an 'ontology in terms of the book.' A relationship which, he insists, is 'as essential and irreducible for the human condition as language itself' (BV xi)?). One's discernment of the face qua face is always already in conformity with the form (σχημα) of the face to which one has *become accustomed*, and the imperative milieu within which one *has been raised*. That the face is characterised by (its) height (*hauteur*) refers as much, I believe, to the 'processes' through which one is *raised into an appreciation* for the authority of the face as it does to the face being heterogeneously provokable. The σχημα of the face is installed generatively through study, rite and lore. The 'production' of the face is dramatized liturgically.

However, if the law of the 'face' is inscribed in the flesh (a concept 'essential to Judaism,' Levinas urges, 'the consent to a corporeal wound [circumcision] to be undergone' (CTI 63)) and the idolater (the pagan, barbarian, or non-Jew) is one who, in the words of Numbers 15:31, shall be '*cut off* from this world and *cut off* from the world to come' (CTI 63), then the pagan, according to Jewish tradition, is arguably a bit of (a) *schmuck* (*prépuce*) for scorning this teaching (and might this not be the original connotation of this Yiddish word?). Talmudic witticism aside, of which there is much in Levinas' work it must be noted, the pagan is 'cut off' from the world to come, excised from (Holy) history (as the ethical relation '*cuts across* [*tranche*] every relation one could call mystical' (TI 202)) because the pagan, apropos of Levinas, and in accordance with the σχημα under which Levinas labours, in consonance with the μῦθος to which he appeals, is one for whom 'its place in the sun, its ground, its site, *orient* all signification' (PII 52). Paganism is 'putting down roots,' roots that 'possess God inwardly,' 'a forest or prehuman humanity,' 'nationalism.' By contrast, Levinas declares, the scriptural economy of Judaism is founded upon a *substitution* of the letter for the soil (SWAB 137). A structural move, no doubt, which duplicates, while prefiguring, the substitution of the subject for the Other, since both movements involve a transposition of site and a shift in orientation. A shift again reflected in the transference of the locus of Jewish spirituality from the 'Temple to the house of study, from cult to study' (RIJT 135), although the yeshiva has in many ways preserved its cultic heritage, I would maintain.

It is upon the 'arid soil of the desert, where *nothing* is *fixed*,' Levinas will contend, that Judaism bases its exercise (CTI 58). Yet the ascian spaces across which

Judaism remains amenable to 'dwelling' because the identities of the 'Jew' and the 'pagan' are no less fixed, I believe, than the sod into which the 'roots' of paganism extend. The pagan is ascribed a fixed place within the social edifice of Levinas' thought and bears the mark within the latter's work of what with Visker we might term an 'attachment.' For she is 'attached to something and suffers from that attachment' without electing so to suffer. Should peoples, 'spiritually mediocre' or otherwise, be impugned because 'they try to live with their attachments in different symbolic articulations than ours' (Visker, 1999, 392)? As living symbolism is a largely unconscious affair, and one is always symbolically predisposed to respond to the alien qua alien (pagan), in contradistinction to the familiar qua familiar (Jew), is it not rather this *difference* that interrupts the  $\mu\hat{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\varsigma$  by which one lives one's life, revealing it to one as myth, and is it not this revelation (at whatever level of stratification it is realized, whether it be in terms of individual, cultural-religious or political narratives) to which one is awakened or sobered up (*dégrise*) by the Other?

#### § 34. Translation

Revelation, Levinas will charge, entails a '*constant hermeneutics* of the word' (*RIJT* 138). It is a question, then, of whether this hermeneutics, as it is practised by Levinas, mires his thinking of the Other within the confines of a *circulus vitiosus*, or situates it within the *circulus probus* of genuinely productive thought. Should we entertain, with Newton, the suggestion that Levinasian proto-ethics might profitably be described as a doing 'Torah-for-the-sake-of-the-Other' (Newton, 2001, 108), then we must ascertain to what extent the embodiment of this performance (the performance of the Torah as a being for-the-other) is regulated in Levinas' work by conservative exegetical convention. Does the 'constancy' of the hermeneutic to which Levinas adheres not elevate this endeavour generatively beyond the 'volume of the book' that would be its 'living space' (*RIJT* 130)?

If the mark of a sound hermeneutic is its heritability, and if 'sense' is generative in determination, can one restrict its exegetical compass and delimit its course without suspending the dynamism that is its *nisus*? How do the directives of demythologization and renewal (where the latter signifies at once the 'commemoration of Holy History' and 'a continuation of the events commemorated through interpretation' (*SAW* 128)) maintain their respective integrity despite the

tension that obtains between them?<sup>7</sup> After all, Levinas will concede that ‘we have not yet finished translating the Bible.’ Like the beginning phenomenologist, ‘we have hardly begun’ (TP 75), he confers. The ‘work of the Septuagint remains unfinished’ (ISM 97). If the process of ‘liberating’ and ‘universalising’ the meaning housed within the scriptures to which Levinas refers is incomplete, if, that is, this work ‘must be continued’ (TP 75), can the testimony of these texts and the commentaries they inspire be safeguarded against the chicanery of heterodox interpretation? For example, Levinas wishes to preserve both the sense that the Torah possesses a ‘divine origin’ (‘there is no question here of putting *that* meaning aside (CTI 61)), and to proffer a Talmudic *drash* of this origin in which its celestial provenance is construed generatively. The spiritual life of the text is *sustained across generations (as if it were sent down from heaven)* such that ‘the Torah not only reproduces what was taught yesterday,’ but is also ‘read according to tomorrow’ (CTI 66).

There is a disquietude here, I believe, a disquietude (*inquiétude*) perhaps akin to that which ‘manifests itself within one’s enjoyment of the element’ (TI 140; translation altered), a disquietude exhibited, once again, as a tension, a tension under which the Levinasian corpus strains. If it is, as Levinas states, ‘the multiple stances of the scholars’ that ‘constitute’ the very life of the Torah (OJRS 101), or in more egalitarian terms, ‘humanity in its multipersonal plurality’ that comprises the locus of its revelation (CTI 64), how can one secrete behind, beyond, or on the hither side of this heritable production an origin (ἀρχή) that is purportedly ouranic in status? If we, perhaps at Levinas’ request, *translate* this grievance into ‘Greek,’ are we not compelled to question the terms in which Levinas’ account of the face is protracted? If the ‘multipersonal plurality’ of the human community is the stage upon which the face is cleared for signification, can ‘one’ determine its sense precisely without trammelling the horizons of its institution?

The other person, I would insist, dashes the form (albeit the σχῆμα of the face) through which one would approach her, placing even the μῦθος of the face to which one strives to remain faithful within parentheses, in order to suspend the self-evidences that are tacitly deposited along with it. It is my contention that Levinas repeatedly conflates proto-ethical insight with its religious and cultural illustration and thus limits the pertinence of the face unduly (and, according to Scots law, one’s

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<sup>7</sup> This tension, or torsion, is well documented by Levinas himself. For example, in ‘The Pact’ (1981), he confides that for the Jew ‘there is constantly within us a struggle between our adherence to the spirit and to what is called the letter’ (TP 78). The title of Levinas 1963 collection of essays, *Difficult Freedom*, again reflects this tension.



pertinence is one's heritable estate). Where such conflation occurs, description of the face (already symbolical) slides back into myth, restoring to it its unrestricted plenitude and power. It may be that it is the 'historical continuity' (*RIJT* 135) of interpretation that guarantees its probity (even though the 'history of each piece of writing counts less than the lessons it contains,' Levinas admits (*RIJT* 137)). However the continuity broached here moves within the ambit of myth, and draws upon its resources, since it is the historicity of exegetical activity, rather than the mythological nature of the stories (μῦθοι) it treats, that must be upheld. Yet such historicity must be upheld in order to support (and preserve) those μῦθοι over whose meaning Talmudic scholars pour.

The logic upon which this reasoning draws is pure mythologic, despite its laudable intentions otherwise. Indeed, the attempt to draw the proto-ethical back into the cultural or religious sphere of determinate meaning fails necessarily because proto-ethicality, apropos of Levinas, presupposes the disjunction of face and form. Moreover, this disjunction strips the face of its injunctive force, I would argue, since it disengages the face from its imperative context, effacing both the inner and outer horizons against which it signifies as a face. Seemingly, though, this is the move Levinas will himself seek to make by laying claim to the idea that the positive religion of Judaism, through recourse to its method, its 'method of procedure' being the transmission (*lelamed*) of the Torah by way of tradition, makes it possible for 'true revelation to take place' (*TP* 79).

Now, Levinas does wonder whether this 'revelation' is 'precarious enough,' and questions whether it is 'protected from all contamination by being or culture' (*NGTT* 121). Ultimately, however, it is the 'consciousness of an indisputable participation' in the 'responsibilities of a holy History' (*DJ* 9; *EJ* 24) that convinces Levinas of the surety of his proposals. How very different, one might ask, is this 'consciousness of participation' (*la conscience d'une participation irrécusable*), although of course, inflected quite distinctly within the religion of Judaism, from those 'participations,' 'pre-liaisons,' and 'pre-reasonings,' Levinas, by way of the anthropology of Lévy-Bruhl, deems to be synonymous, and therefore reprehensible, with the 'pre-logical mentality' of 'primitive' peoples (*LB* 49)? Certainly there is an equivalence in kind here, if not in form. 'Primitive men live before all Revelation,' one notes, 'before the light' of reason (*EE* 61) and, more pointedly, its Talmudic exposition, alights upon their Culturexculture to liberate them from servilism and

sorcery.<sup>8</sup> As the proto-ethical relation is dramatised liturgically, and its staging or *mise-en-scène* is founded upon the ‘incomparable strength of ritual’ (*DJ* 8), one can only presume, from reading Levinas, that the ‘pagan’ is *persona non grata et non dramatis*, since the impedimenta of paganism obstruct the ‘path of deliverance and elevation’ (*RIJT* 138). The face being, as it were, the *locus editus* from which sense signifies in its exorbitance, straightforwardness (*droiture*) and, what Levinas will refer to tellingly as its ‘non historical simplicity’ (*MS* 58).

Of course, if phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty confers, endeavours to achieve a ‘primitive contact’ with the world of lived experience, and to ‘endow that contact with a philosophical status’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, vii; emphasis added), and the ‘soul,’ or ‘psychism,’ Levinas deduces is properly *contactual*, as we have purported, then one might feasibly advance Levinasian first-philosophy (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) as a primitivism of sorts. This is a primitivism no doubt obliquely inferred through Levinas’ allusions to Robinson Crusoe, when the latter ‘in the tropical splendour of nature, though he has maintained his ties with civilization...experiences in meeting Man Friday the greatest event of his insular life – in which a man who speaks replaces the ineffable sadness of echoes’ (*TW* 148).<sup>9</sup> Only a world that has been sufficiently desacralized (the purview of the Jew, Levinas will urge) permits what Robert Gibbs describes as ‘that full translation of the relations to God to become realized in our relations with other people’ (Gibbs, 1992, 165; emphasis added). Neither the paradisaical splendour of Crusoe’s Island, nor the element into which things recede (nor, indeed, the things themselves) contest one’s place in being. For the element (*l’élément*), like the ‘things,’ is ‘faceless’ (*TI* 142) and thus incapable of beleaguering one ethically. There can be ‘no natural religion,’ Levinas will charge (*TI* 117), no divination of the element, since the interhuman relation (the meta-physical relation) is supra-natural and eschews the conative life that would bring about its dissembly.

Yet is this very eschewal not marked by dissemblance? For does it not dissemble the conative drive it would profess to sublimate? The extirpation of the ‘I’

<sup>8</sup> What irony then, that Levinas should bemoan the fact that ‘Christian theologians have presented themselves as the men who perfected, carried out and rounded off Judaism’ (*SC* 109), when he himself advocates such supersession in relation to non-western, ‘pagan’ cultures.

<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Levinas will also allude to Robinson Crusoe in ‘The Ego and The Totality’ (1954), where, once again, his reference to Defoe’s eponymous protagonist is instructive. ‘Pious souls,’ he states, ‘are returning to the historically constituted religions.’ However, ‘when they create for themselves an individual religion, they live off the wreckage of shipwrecked churches, like Robinson Crusoe who achieves independence on his Island only thanks to the rifles and casks of gunpowder he recovered from his lost ship’ (*ET* 30). Evidently, to break with tradition is, for Levinas, to abandon oneself to disaster.

from its conatus, the extrication of a culture from its 'enrootedness' (*enracinement*), derive their momentum from an equally imperious 'source,' one might contend, as the conation they would seek to surpass. Indeed, the *energeia* upon which such endeavour draws – the en-ergy deployed in the 'vision of the face [*vision du visage*]' (TI 196) – might, *pace* Levinas, be designated an *allergy*, and more specifically, what one might term a *theallergy* (an allergy to both spectacle (θεῖά) and goddess (θεῖά), alike). For the 'non-allergic relation with alterity' Levinas invokes (TI 47), is accomplished as the subjugation of an 'impersonal fecundity,' that 'faceless, generous mother' that is the 'matrix of particular beings' (TI 46). To be sure, 'the reduction to restlessness [*la réduction à l'inquiétude*]' (OBBE 45; AE 77) Levinas implements, the reduction to the subject in its diachrony, admits of what he calls 'assembled forces [*forces assemblées*]'; that is, it admits of 'simultaneous forces *in its union*' [*forces simultanées dans son union*]' (OBBE 45; AE 77; emphasis added). The management of these forces does not perturb Levinas, however, nor does he appear willing to concede that signification (the one-for-the-other) is buttressed by conation, at least in so far as the staging of the former is prepared for through the extrusion, expurgation and eradication of the latter in its various guises. Thus, it may be the 'subversion of essence' (OBBE 164), that opens the field of ethics, yet this field receives its charge from the conation it rescinds – or rather sublimates – as crucially, for Levinas, it is a question of sublimating 'idols' in whatever form they are manifest (HGU 234) particularly when it is the plasticity of form itself that is apt to beguile and seduce one. Like Nietzsche, then, Levinas may be said to have an 'evil eye' for 'idols' (Nietzsche, 1990, 31).

Now, it is one thing to denounce 'the philosophy of Hitler' as 'simplistic,' and to disclaim 'the *primitive* powers that burn within it' for 'awakening elementary feelings' within the 'German soul' (RPH 64; emphasis added). It is quite another, of course, to discern the same 'powers' at work within the diverse cultures of 'Asia,' 'Africa,' and 'Australia,' or to discredit as 'pagan,' modalities of religious expression for which 'God' is not personal, or is of no consequence at all (RIJT 134). One wonders whether the mercy (*rachamim*) that 'attenuates the rigours' of Hebraic Law (RIJT 142) – Law that is 'always subject to the review of love' (ETE 113) – might extend to embrace the pagan estranged by that very Law, not to subsume the pagan within the Jewish (or 'abolish' the differences between the 'Jew' and the 'pagan' (IU 177), only to then identify Judaism with humanity, but to honour the difference through which justice is instituted and the 'political' space in which it produced.

Might the pagan, in Levinas, not stand for that which resists the closure of the work (*oeuvre*) and complicates the order it upholds? By opening the work of Levinas to *the other within its midst*, might the pagan not put back into play (play having been decisively suspended (*OBBE* 146)) the possibility of configurations of the 'face' proscribed by Levinas? Must we not speak, then, *within the context of Levinas' work* of a pagan attestation? This is indeed a *risk to be run*. But did Levinas himself not concede, in *Totality and Infinity*, that 'the separated being must *run the risk* of the paganism which evinces its separation and in which their separation is accomplished' (*TI* 142; emphasis added)? What Levinas intends to convey here, I think, is the sense in which the existent accomplishes its 'separation' – through enjoyment – by wresting itself from the anonymity of brute being (*l'être brut*). The 'I' 'crystallizes' (*se cristallise*) in enjoyment (*TI* 143; *TeI* 154). Thus establishing, according to Levinas, a distance between itself and the nutrimental source that nourishes it. It is this distance (the interval of separation) that permits the 'I' to live 'interiorly' (*intérieurement*) and to take up residence in being, while maintaining its distance, and therefore its independence, from that *from which it lives* (*TI* 143; *TeI* 154). The 'I' is henceforth 'enrooted in what it is not' (it is pagan because 'dwelling' and 'inhabitation' belong to the essence, or egoism of the 'I') yet separated 'within this enrootedness' (*TI* 143). In a suitably gnomic statement, Levinas will conclude that such paganism must be brooked 'until the moment the death of these gods [namely one's 'aesthetic orientation' (*TI* 140)] will lead back to atheism and to the *true* transcendence' (*TI* 142). The 'true' transcendence, of course, is that of the face and its epiphany, which must not be conflated with the element, Levinas insists, since 'between the I and *what it lives from* there does not extend the absolute distance that separates the same from the other' (*TI* 143).

The assurance with which Levinas defaces the element not only, as John Sallis contends, deprives 'elemental nature of the capacity for heterogeneous provocation,' thereby effacing the unique concurrence of elementals that constitute it, but also re-inscribes Levinas' analysis of the element within the 'most classical philosophical conceptuality' (Sallis, 2000, 159n.17). Moreover, by equating paganism (a term with a distinctly dubious semantic history) with 'aesthetic orientation' (*l'orientation esthétique*), and by doing so under the auspices of philosophical enquiry (that is as *translation*), philosophical enquiry, furthermore, informed by the anthropology of Lévy-Bruhl, with its emphasis upon 'mentality' as an 'orientation' within being (*LB* 50), Levinas reinforces the primacy of his basic opposition between the 'pagan' and the 'Jew' by assigning each their relative polarity and bearing. Through the

deducement of a structural parity, or parallelism, between; non-Western cultures, Nazism, the philosophy of Heidegger, psychoanalysis and the appreciation of art (quite a *mélange* of terms, one notes), Levinas assimilates the above to his opposition between the 'pagan' and the 'Jew,' the determinants between which his work unfolds, determinants that may be transcribed thus:

Jew: ethical: holy: history :: Pagan: aesthetic: sacred: myth

One may concur with Visker, therefore, when he suggests that the distinction 'between the sacred and the holy (the sacred being that which results from a taboo; the holy being that which has put a taboo *on itself*) is at work in every move that Levinas makes in developing his ethics' (Visker, 1999, 283). However, to award the sacred and the holy their proper names, and, after all, Levinas' work is a veritable onomasticon, is to refer such terms to the explicata from which they derive their concretion, specificity, and focus, within the work of Levinas (i.e., the 'Jew' and the 'pagan'). This is, then, to put a face to their formality, or at least, to situate both terms *face-à-face* within the work they help to structure.

### § 35. *Pagan attestation*

What then of pagan attestation? The properly pagan attestation is necessarily exergual, taking place outside the work, outwith its ruling and in defiance of its law, in contestation of those 'norms' by which the figures, to which the pagan would be reduced, are judged *within the work*. The pagan is indeed 'shut up in this world' (Levinas, 1935 [1981], 90), this work-world, and his/her/its testimony stifled. Yet within the work of Levinas might the pagan not reveal itself, in a manner not dissimilar to the call of conscience (*Gewissensruf*) in Heidegger, as 'something like an *alien* voice' (BT §57 [277])? A voice which, within Levinas' work may very well 'discourse' in the mode of 'keeping silent' (how could it do, or rather be, otherwise, for it is in discourse that the 'absolutely foreign alone can instruct us' (TI 73)), but which nonetheless, summons the work from 'the lostness in which it has forgotten itself' (BT §57 [277]), the abandon of its *μῦθος*? Perhaps it is this voice, in its obmutescence, that compels one to find *les mots justes* to describe, treat, and entertain, those to whom the work is less than cordial. Those for whom 'discourse' (λόγος) is not pre-eminent (the nonhuman) – and if the pagan, as Nietzsche exhorts, is one who says 'yes to all things' (Nietzsche, 1990a, 187), proto-ethics may need to accommodate those it has hitherto only regarded as things – or for whom the 'severe daily joy' (CTI 68) of study, and the erudition of the yeshiva, are not sanctioned.



Those who are, perhaps, not invited to 'seek' and 'decipher,' that is, 'to *Midrash*' (*RIJT* 133), because their gender, as that which gives an improper form (μορφή) to their face, prohibits them from doing so according to exegetical custom.

If philosophy, as Merleau-Ponty adverts, is 'the reconversion of silence and speech into one another' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 129), then one must endeavour to find a place *within Levinas' philosophy* for those extruded by the terms under which it operates; lest one conflate, during the performance of that philosophy, the 'said' of its enunciation with the 'saying' by which it is oriented, or confuse the generality of its insight with the particularity of its illustration. Is this not what Derrida proposes when he speaks of language as interruption, and interruption as 'another language' that 'comes to disturb' language, 'another text,' the 'text of the other,' which arrives '*in silence*' to displace the 'language of translation' (Derrida, 1980, 18), the language of the accord, or pact, between 'Jerusalem' and 'Athens' as we have understood it?

Once again, it is a question of exegesis and its regulation, of the marshalling of one's sensitivity and attunement to the Other, of the sense of sense (*sens*) that is *already* settled and prescribed before the advent of the Other, of meaning that 'lies in the future' (*MT* 67), ordering the present by its interdicts and thus impeding the Other's arrival. If we must '*pass through* interpretation to surpass interpretation' (*MT* 67), whether this be of texts or that which the latter prime us to encounter, namely the face, then are we not *under an obligation* to suspend that which is merely tralaticious (even though, according to Levinas, for him 'no credo orientates the reading of [religious] texts' (*RIJT* 138)) and put on hold the *lelamed*, or transmission, that it bestows (the *Sendung* it sends), so as to make the passage, along the fault line of this interruption of tradition, custom and convention, to the limits of our heritable estate; From where, to be sure, *ilyaity* threatens, but from which a truly heterogeneous space opens?

Of course, it is not simply a case of awarding the pagan, *paynim*, or *païen*, their *panim*, or face, since, let us be clear, Levinas no where deprives the human being of its face (the same cannot be said of the non-human creature and the elemental), but rather of ascribing the pagan a face within the context of Levinas' work and thus delineating a space of contestation, *within the work (oeuvre)*, from which the voice of this/these other(s) might be heard. Perhaps the pagan may be said to disenchant the work, to sober it from its very own 'intoxicating equivocations [*envirantes equivoques*]' (*TI* 202; *TeI* 22). Such disenchantment (*désenchantement*) – and is disenchantment not the work of Levinas work, its τέλος, as it were – is not restricted

in its exercise. The positive religion of Judaism cannot be indemnified against this process. For, whether already calcified, or furtively deposited, self-evidences of whatever provenance ('religious' or 'philosophical') are to be interrogated with equal force. Interrogation of this sort is called for, summoned, by the Other before whom this derangement (*dérangement*) of the work is staged, I would contend.

The work of Levinas is *enthused* by the pagan, one might argue, enthused, therefore, by the prospect of its own disenchantment, disenchantment which, in accordance with the logic to which Levinas subscribes, is the necessary, precursive condition for the 'holiness' (*la sainteté*) his various studies seek to 'disengage' (*OBBE* 59). This 'pagan mood' (*TI* 47), or *Stimmung* – this enthusiasm – would be suppressed by Levinas were it not that which animates his oeuvre and justifies its course. Levinas himself will speak of attestation and he will do so as a Jew; Jews being those who, as Adam Newton reminds us, 'are religiously bound to become *mefarshim* (expounders),' and thus in Levinas' case also '*metzavim* (commanders);' that is 'to personalize, and give verbal consent to, [religious] criteria never placed in jeopardy' (Newton, 2001, 175). Certainly Levinas' work attests to his Jewry, whether it does so elliptically, through allusion to Jewish topoi, or emphatically, as that which the work effects. The truth of Levinas' vision of the face, the truth of Levinas' testimony (*témoignage*), is borne by the work and its performance, by the extent to which the work dismantles itself *to make space* for the Other, by the extent to which the work is prepared *to place itself in jeopardy*, that is, to place in jeopardy those terms, themata, and figures that delimit the space of its attestation.

The truth of Levinas' testimony is therefore *the work of ethics*, the work of freeing the space of attestation for-the-other, the work of liberating Levinas' works from the assumptions that jeopardise their work, of eradicating such self-evidences as those that might efface the face and limit its signification and thus of ensuring that what Levinas refers to as the 'entirety of the spiritual procedure' which 'conditions the upsurge of the given' be reconstituted *in concreto* (*WSNP* 222). Was it not Levinas himself who confided that 'an orientation which goes freely from the Same to the Other is a Work' (*MS* 49)?

### § 36. *Determination and production*

I have deliberately sought to problematize the disparity between Levinas' work and its work, in order to hold Levinas to account before his own 'testimony.' The themes of 'testimony' (*témoignage*) and 'prophecy' (*prophétisme*) are deployed consistently

throughout Levinas' later writings and treat the 'traumatism' (*traumatisme*) of one's being ordered *to, in and by* the face of the Other. The inscription of this order in the *for-the-other* of obedience, Levinas will contend, 'is an anarchic being affected' which 'slips into me "like a thief"' (*OBBE* 148), making it possible for me to be 'the author of what was, *without my knowledge* inspired in me – to have received, *whence we know not*, that of which I am the author' (*TDIT* 105; emphasis added). This testification is 'made *before* all theology' (*OBBE* 149), Levinas urges, and is the 'unforeseeable response of the chosen one' (*OBBE* 145) – the 'scandal of sincerity' (*OBBE* 143) – substituting herself for the Other.

Yet, is the testimony to which Levinas attests, not theologically conditioned? Have Hebraic directives not *slipped into* Levinas' witness 'like a thief' (*comme un voleur*)? To be sure, I have endeavoured to accent such slippages wherever possible and to underscore and clarify their motivation. It has proved requisite to question the saliency of Levinas' pronouncements and, indeed, to disengage them from the 'said' in which they are thematized, as Levinas himself would seek to disengage the '*otherwise than being*' from the themes in which it is exhibited (*OBBE* 6). However, have I been just in my appraisal of Levinas; has my reading of his work not, at times, been rather puerile, given the advancement of specious claims and trifling objections? It is hoped the objections I have raised will not be met with disapproval, for, like the testimony of Levinas they have proffered to complicate, they have been set forth in sincerity, in response to a work that astounds as it inspires. That such a work should astound can be no surprise, since the wonder (*étonnement*) in which philosophy begins (θαυμάζειν), the wonder that for Levinas is traumatically inspired in the self by the Other, has been the very *ratio* of his work (*OBBE* 181).

One may well wonder, though, how astonishment of this sort is managed, and how its exorbitance is constrained. What protects wonder (*étonnement*), for example, from the dissolution of delirium (*délire*); the very 'delirium to be reduced by philosophy [*délire à réduire par la philosophie*]' (*OBBE* 152; *AE* 238)? If I am, as Levinas suggests, 'the go-between for what I set forth' (*GO* 146), if the obligation or command (*commandement*) to be *for-the-other* is, as it were, 'stated by the mouth of him it commands,' revealing a 'plot' (*intrigue*) Levinas is 'tempted to call religious' (*OBBE* 147), can I be certain that what is called forth in me is not, in the words of Heidegger, a 'fantastical exaction' (*BT* §53 [266])? No doubt, there is a remarkable congruence to be adduced here between the Levinasian account of testimony and the Heideggerian presentation of 'attestation' (*BT* §§53-60 [260-295]), concinnity we

have no need to reprise since we have submitted this structural consonance to scrutiny above.<sup>10</sup>

Plainly, both modalities of 'witness' are predicated upon the anonymity of the summons one receives. Whether this summons issues from Being, the other person, or 'elsewhere' (*ailleurs*), and whether, furthermore, this elsewhere attests, qua trace, to the adventure of the Infinite (what Levinas will term *illeity*), or the 'indeterminate menace' (*menace indéterminée*) of the *il y a* (*EE* 59; *DEE* 96): both are crossed to 'the point of possible confusion,' we recall (*TPA* 224). But this decussation of indeterminants deprives the subject of certainty in the face of that which assails it, since the subject, formed in passivity, arises *on the basis* of this passivity. Dasein, then, may project itself upon its ownmost potentiality-for-Being *upon the basis of a nullity* (Dasein is the Being of this basis (*BT* §58 [283])). The subject of responsibility, however, *presents itself* upon the basis of its passivity ('here I am' (*me voici*)), taking up the gauntlet of indeterminacy in recognition of this risk. In the midst of indeterminacy and aporia – 'at the heart of the ambiguity of inspiration' (*OBBE* 149) – from a space that may be both 'nocturnal,' that is, 'full of the nothingness of everything' (*EE* 58), and the openness of a 'layout without security' (*OBBE* 179), the subject, exposed in its inwardness, bears witness (*il témoigne*) to its responsibility for-the-other. Such attestation is 'its very psyche' (*OBBE* 148) – the 'other in the same' (*OBBE* 149) – Levinas avers.

Like the vectors of the face (*ilyaity*, *illeity*, *tertiality*) whose decussation Levinas outlines, the modes of utterance we have previously outlined – the epotic modes in and through which Levinas deduces the terms of his ethical metaphysics – are chiastically intertwined. The modes of prescription, proscription, presentation and proclamation are crossed and, in a manner not dissimilar to the decussation of the optic nerves which permit sight, the laying bare of the face *descriptively* is always already an attestation of one's being for-the-other *ethically*. Hence, the 'iteration of exposure is expression, sincerity, saying,' Levinas will conclude (*OBBE* 153). The 'here I am' (*me voici*), for which, as Hilary Putman notes, the Hebrew word is *hineni*, 'performs the speech-act of calling attention to, or *presenting*.' Thus, *hineni* 'performs the speech-act of presenting myself, the speech-act of making myself available to another' (Putman, 2002, 38). Levinas' empiricism is indeed radical (*TI* 196), therefore, because the description of the face it assays is at once kerygmatic.

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<sup>10</sup> A perspicuous example of such consonance is to be found in *Otherwise than Being*, where Levinas will speak of 'my proximity with the neighbour, where I state, in the autonomy of the voice of conscience, a responsibility, which could not have begun in me' (*OBBE* 161).

However, and here I recapitulate my earlier assertion, perhaps this empiricism is not radical enough. Although it would purport to be eminently fossorial can it claim to have fully excavated, and probed, the site of its own provenance?

Perhaps the face is decussated by transversals whose status within the work of Levinas (one thinks here of the earth (*la terre*) qua Ark and the elemental (*l'élément*)) is at best provisional. Why should the face and its generation not admit of a terrene ancestry? Why should one not endeavour to 'present' this *Urhistorie* phenomenologically and to relate the heritability of the face to what is arguably its fourth transversal? Why, if the 'patience of passivity' is 'always at the limit [*être toujours à bout*]' (*OBBE* 153), must a limitation be imposed upon the signification of the face? These are certainly moot points, points whose certainty, like the 'indefiniteness' of the certainty of Dasein's Being-towards-the-end (*BT* §53 [265]), I have allowed myself to cultivate throughout my study of Levinas. I have adopted this ploy not to abrogate the terms of Levinas' analyses (analyses which are, after all, masterful in their complexity, scope and insight), as if such terms were mere delenda, but to question the order of their assembly in Levinas' work and situate them against the horizons of their institution.

Again, it may be that obligation, as Levinas confers, 'calls for a unique response not inscribed in universal thought' (*OBBE* 145), a response for which the medium of philosophical discourse is ill suited. Yet this admission, to be sure, made before the face of the Other *hic et nunc* (although infinitely reiterative in its dramatization), forsakes its own accession to truth, at least in so far as truth is tantamount to universality, by limiting itself, as Husserl would limit the universality of the phenomenological reduction to delimit the remit of his reflection (*Id* §32 [56]), to the particularity of this other *here*, who faces me *at this very moment* (*en ce moment même*). Before this face, I am instructed to be *for-the-other*, as if this instruction, which 'circumscribes me,' instructed me by my own voice (*OBBE* 147). As if? Levinas cannot guarantee the legitimacy of this claim nor safeguard its probity, for ventured as testimony, its truth is confirmed in its performance. Of course, 'Being true as Being-uncovering' is a way of Being for Dasein (*BT* §44 [220]); a way, or *ὁδός*, that is grounded (and thus un-grounded) in the ecstatico-horizonal unity of temporality; a way, moreover, upon which the methodological proposals of *Being and Time* are based, and upon which the cogency of the arguments found therein depend.

For Levinas, one might contend, prophecy is the method of ethics, its possibility and execution, a trauma to be undergone both textually (the work must



suffer the ambivalence of its pronouncements) and substantially ('the subject is persecution and martyrdom' (OBBE 146)). This method entails that truth, and the very question of truth appealed to in the works of Levinas, be conceived as diachrony and alternance; a movement between terms, the alternation 'between universality and individuation' (OBBE 126). It is in this alternance, this scintillation (*scintillation*), that Levinas discerns the trace of the Infinite, the trace of an *illeity* that, as he expresses it, 'makes the word God be pronounced, without letting "divinity" be said' (OBBE 162). Why must the word 'God' be said at this juncture; what compels its enunciation?

If one identifies prophecy with that 'reversal whereby the perception of an order coincides with the meaning of this order *made up by* the one who obeys it' (TDTT 105), then is not to broach the name 'God' a rather fabulous construction, a *μῦθος* even; a myth to be worked loose from its situs? Now, Levinas does suggest that he has recourse to the word God 'without suppressing the intermediaries [*sans supprimer les intermediaries*]' that lead him to this word (OBBE 128; AE 204). Yet one may perhaps question the sincerity of this concession, since the 'intermediaries' (*intermediaries*) Levinas moots within works such as *Otherwise than Being*, the horizons he purportedly reconstitutes there, gesture beyond the remit of these works and require further explication. To claim that sense (*sens*) cannot 'do without God' (MS 48), and that God is 'other than the other [*autre qu'autrui*]' (GP 141), leaving a trace of 'Himself' in time by which the latter is oriented (time is *à-Dieu*, according to Levinas (NM 166)) is to subvert the sense of phenomenological enquiry and interrupt its elucidation of the given (even where the given is given *as* interruption). The human, as Levinas adverts, may be the 'place where God works' (IEO 148), where God *falls under sense*. Arguably, however, it is 'God' who justifies the work of Levinas' work, for it is 'God' that ordains its mandate.

That this is so, is evidenced by the following statement from 'Meaning and Sense.' There Levinas remarks that 'the face, wholly open, can at the same time be in itself because it is in the trace of *illeity*.' '*Illity*,' he continues 'is the origin of the alterity of being' (MS 64). To root (and here I deploy this phrase purposefully) the 'alterity of being,' the alterity of the Other, in the trace of *illeity*, is, I believe, to incline the work of Levinas toward theology and thus to rumble its an-archic pretensions, that is, to see through its constation to the demonstration upon which it depends. No doubt, Levinas would deduce from this rumbling the *bourdonnement* in which the *il y a* is announced, the *frôlement*, or rustling, by which the 'indeterminateness that constitutes its acuteness' (EE59) menaces one, since there is 'ambiguity of sense *and* non-sense in being,' he suggests (OBBE 163; emphasis

added). Yet again, why postulate a 'God' when transcendence will suffice? Why take a detour (*détour*) at the face where none is necessary?

To be sure, for Levinas, and the work for which he is known, it is precisely a question of necessity here, as it is God that *orients* one toward the Other, and thus God that *orients* one toward the Good (TPA 223). The 'curvature' of ethical space, curvature whose elevation we have previously accented, is the 'very presence of God,' Levinas will opine (TI 291). The contraction of God 'makes space' for the interaction of ethics, one might say (IGRHV 166), *illeity* being that which permits one to 'accomplish a movement toward the neighbour' (OBBE 13). Taken strictly, however, is it not the removal, rather than the withdrawal, of God from the field of ethics that makes way for the sanctity (*sainteté*) of the face; ethics being the 'field sketched out by the paradox of an Infinite in relation' (WE 200), the sense (*sens*) of which, I have argued, is *sketched out, schematized and disseminated* generatively?

### § 37. Conclusion

Throughout the present study care has been taken to emphasize what I have called the heritability of the face. And while it would in no way compromise the integrity of the proposals outlined to advance the face as the heir of the 'Infinite,' the infinity set forth in this work need not pass for God (nor even, *qua* trace, as God). Levinas proffers this word too soon, I would contend (and, against his own best intentions, deduces 'too readily the truths of faith' (S 92)), as he does the word 'evil,' to describe Being in its positivity (EE 20). Perhaps a little more reticence is in order, a little more patience, a willingness to stay the course of indeterminacy and endure the aporetic, to avoid conflating the upper case *Il* (He) with the Latinate *ille*, and to efface even this name for God (*illeity*) such that its effacement clears a space for the face-to-face relation it putatively orientates. Yes, Levinas acknowledges the ilyaity basal to passivity (*passivité*). Susceptibility without 'assumption' is laid bare, he will insist, upon the basis of the *il y a* ('to support without compensation, the excessive or disheartening hubbub and encumberment of the *there is* is needed' (OBBE 164)). Yet, despite this appeal to ilyaity, and its subversion of essence, it is God that makes possible my conversion from a presence to self (my auto-referentiality) to 'my presence as present,' a movement in and through which my being delivered over as a hostage to the Other is accomplished (OBBE 151), a conversion we have hitherto had cause to problematize.

Levinas, then, requires God to be both an 'idea-in-me' that exceeds the capacity of thought, and thus implicates 'me' in an 'ex-ceptional' relationship with that which transcends cognition – the *in* of the Infinite signifies both *non* finitude and *within* the finite (*GP* 136) – and the name for the 'institution of justice (*SIRI* 218). It is under these circumstances, Levinas will maintain, that God *comes to mind* (*vient à l'idée*). God's *coming to mind* in such ways, is not incompatible with God's being 'dead.' At least in so far as the Nietzschean apophthegm, like the Levinasian God, describes a certain orientation within Being. In Nietzsche's case a cultural predicament and the genesis of its possibility. Transcendence is, therefore, a 'passing over to being's other,' a passing over that must surmount the 'anonymous rustling of the *there is*,' that essence that '*works* as an invincible persistence in essence' and is 'confirmed positively to be the *conatus* of beings' (*OBBE* 3-4). Hence, the rustling (*bruissement*) of the *il y a* is likened by Levinas to the 'murmur of attendants [*murmure des postulants*]' at the 'place left vacant by one who died [*la place laissée vacante par le mourant*]' (*OBBE* 3; *AE* 14). A place, whether construed culturally (the death of a certain God (*OBBE* 185)), or metontologically ('the void left by the negation of Being' (*OBBE* 4)), one must surpass in order that the moral turpitude indicative of conation might be outstripped and its incessancy stalled.

That conation might be outstripped, and that I might be extirpated from my *conatus*, is thanks to God (*grace à Dieu*), Levinas will assert, for it is God who *directs* me to the Other *despite myself*, and despite the interest (*interressement*) I take in my own being. As Levinas confirms, "Here I am," just that! The word God is still absent from the phrase in which God is for the first time involved in words. It does not at all state "I believe in God" (*OBBE* 149). God's involvement in discourse, and thus the involvement of God in human affairs, can, apropos of Levinas, only be understood through ethics, through the *one-for-the-other* of signification. The language of theology, or so Levinas will claim, 'destroys the religious situation of transcendence.' Such language 'rings false or becomes a myth [*sonne faux ou se fait mythique*],' he concludes (*OBBE* 197n.25; *AE* 192n.1). Yet, if it is at the cusp of conceptuality, so to speak, that thought suffers the name 'God' for that which, as the '*apex* of vocabulary' (*OBBE* 156), disturbs it absolutely, rendering the one in whom this name is *hollowed out* (and thus hallowed), radically passive, then indeterminacy will always undermine the tenure of this name and threaten its provision. Evidently, this is what Levinas has in mind when, citing Isaiah 65:1, he intimates that the biblical 'search for God' in which 'God is found,' is 'still expressed as God *sought*' (*QA* 85; translation altered).

Therefore, the 'path that leads to God must be walked in part without God' (*LTMG* 143).

To be sure, these are audacious proposals for any 'theology' that should seek to thematize its relata with precision, or contain its referent in the form of propositions. Levinas, of course, does not purport to be doing theology (unless it is a 'theology *without* theodicy' (*DR* 177), or one that 'already announces itself in the very wakefulness of insomnia' (*TAI* 159)), but rather to be broaching the 'meaning of the beyond,' of 'transcendence,' which finds its sense in ethics (*BPW* 190n.22). Must we not enquire, however (and to modify the titular order of the Kantian work, a thinker to whom Levinas is, by his own admission, so very close (*OF* 10)), into the groundwork of this metaphysic of morals? What eventuates at the limit of language is prefigured culturally and predelineated socially, I suggest. The designata that *fall under sense* at this limit, of which the term 'God' may be one, since according to Levinas *Gott fällt un sein* where language breaks up (*DTAI* 282), are installed generatively.

The installation of the 'idea of the Infinite' (*enseignement*) requires an appropriate staging or *mise-en-scène* to account for its incidence. Ethical structuration is conditioned *liturgically* (where by liturgy we understand the phenomena of study, rite, and lore) and moulded *pedagogically*. Might one not circumvent the need for 'God' in ethics (*MS* 48) by conceding that assumption and susception are coaxial and coordinate? Is not the 'trace,' in which the face signifies qua face, the accomplishment of education and the achievement of tradition, rather than the furrow, or *tractātus*, of 'God'? Might it not be in the tertiality of the third party (*le tiers*) that the *il* of ilyaity and the *ille* of illeity convene, and the place of their conjunction, the space or *espacement* of ethics? Indeed it might.

To lay claim to this deduction, however, is nevertheless to cede to its uncertainty. For postulation of this kind takes place within an already predetermined orientation, an orientation which, like that of Levinas and the ethical structure he espouses, is constituted by posita that must be worked loose from the situation of their positing and brought to appear against the horizons of their constitution. While every effort has been made throughout the present study to interrogate such posita as and when they are deposited, their presence within this work cannot be avoided. It is with this in view that my concluding remarks, shortly to be advanced, should be understood. For, they reflect a desire to situate the disquisition peculiar to phenomenology at the limit of its exposition of the given, such that those interruptions

and disturbances of phenomenological protocol might themselves be elucidated, those slippages I have had occasion to accent in the work of Levinas throughout this study. To position interpretation *at the limit*, to station exegesis *at the breach*, is to open reflection (at its seams) to both that which conditions its appropriation of the given and to that which transcends its reaches. It is to situate reflection *before the face* – and to situate reflection face-to-face with its own procedure – a face of broader signification than that toward which the thought of Levinas tends, a face reflection cannot delimitate but to which it may attest.

Levinas would, no doubt, identify the reflection described here with the Torah and its *performance*, since the ‘essence’ of the Torah is ‘opening,’ he contends (CTI 67), and the ‘meaning of being’ is ‘to realize the Torah’ (TOT 41). Yet, Levinas’ work, which is itself situated ‘in the fullness of the documents, beliefs and moral practices that characterize the positive fact of Judaism,’ and which professes to be ‘a phenomenology *prior* to a theology’ (ETE 109), remains to some extent invested in its world and hence mired in it. That Levinas’ work should be characterized by its embedment in a world in no way entails that the ethical relation it sets forth and dramatizes so effectively, is perfunctory. However, the provocation of the face is limited by Levinas, and its imperative force regulated by ordinances that constrain the upsurge of what is permitted to signify as a face within his work. It is the constraints imposed upon signification, and the manner of its regulation, that I have sought to examine throughout this treatise on Levinas.

That one should attempt, as it were, to ‘sober up’ (*dégriser*) a work otherwise so committed to describing the ‘sobering up’ (*dégrisement*) of subjectivity and the awakening (*l’éveil*) of the self by the Other is, I trust, condonable. That the verb *dégriser* should connote *to sober up* and *to bring back down to earth* is not, I believe, incidental, though, and once again we may question whether Levinas does indeed promulgate an ‘earthly morality’ (ET 33). Certainly, Levinas will seek to differentiate between two forms of enthusiasm (*enthousiasme*): the enthusiasm through and by which the subject is ‘created’ (‘a sobering ever still to be sobered, a wakefulness on the verge of a new awakening [*dégrisement toujours encore à dégriser, une veille à la veille d’un réveil nouveau*]’ (CW 166; CV 57)), and the enthusiasm that is an ‘intoxication’ (*ivresse*), where intoxication, for Levinas, denotes ‘the possibility of going off [*la possibilité de l’éloignement*],’ the mere ‘semblance of distance [*le semblant de l’éloignement*],’ ‘irresponsibility [*irresponsabilité*],’ and the ‘suppression of fraternity [*suppression de la fraternité*]’ (OBBE 192n.21; AE 138n.2).



As we have seen, the pagan is one who has *yet to sober up*, a crapulent, temulent. If, nonetheless, and despite the ‘hangover’ (*gueule de bois*) that so afflicts the pagan (and the ‘darkness’ of the *il y a* ‘which sweats in them [*qu’elles suintent*]’ (EE 59; DEE 97)), we grant, as we have been prepared to do, that something like a pagan attestation reveals itself within the work of Levinas and gives itself to be heard, might we not concede that this voice, which summons us, rather than being ‘the voice’ of the *il y a* (EE 58), although, of course, it *may be* that, might call to us in an earthly manner? Perhaps the earth and the ‘things’ of the earth contest their place within the work of Levinas *through the figure of the pagan*, the pagan being that through which they are *disincarnate within the work* (as the face, according to Levinas, is that by which the Other is ‘disincarnate [*désincarné*]’ (TI 79; TeI 77)). Furthermore, the earth may itself be the condition for the provocation of the face. That is, the face’s being provokable might draw upon a telluric source. For the earth is not, as Levinas himself confers, simply ‘a base on which things appear, but the condition that the subject requires for their perception; the very *situation* of the subject’ (RR 117). Likewise, Derrida will affirm that ‘the earth gives hospitality before all else, a hospitality already offered to the initial occupant’ (Derrida, 1999, 92), an occupant whose place in the sun Levinas has reason to contest, without contesting that occupant’s God-given right to appropriate the goods of the earth at will. And, let us take heed, this right for Levinas is God-given (ET 28).

Perhaps the ‘true figure of inspiration’ (bearing in mind what has been said previously of truth and attestation) is not (only) to be discerned in the story of the Levites ‘who carried the Holy Ark of the Tabernacle across the desert,’ and who were themselves, Levinas suggests, ‘carried by that Ark’ (JK 121), but is to be found in and as that which founds and supports both acts of portage alluded to here: the earth qua Ark and qua ἀρχή. It may then be, that the human being, *pace* Levinas, is not ‘the unique terrain in which exteriority can appear’ (RIJT 133) since the earth (*terra*) and all things terrene arguably summon one to responsibility. At least, that is, if one has been *rendered susceptible* to their provocation, such rendering, I have maintained, being a product of heritability and the dissemination of sense.

In Levinas’ estimation, of course, such affection to and for the earth is pagan, and it is so precisely because on this account one’s very sense of sense (*sens*) is rooted (*enraciné*) in the earth: one’s determination of sense is terrene in origination. Yet, this earthly precedence of sense need not lead to nationalism, as Levinas fears (unless one conflates enrootedness (*enracinement*) with territoriality (*territorialité*), a temptation

from which the religion of Judaism is not immune), but rather suggests that the earth, or more pointedly, the ‘element’ (*l’élément*), is that *from which* the face signifies.

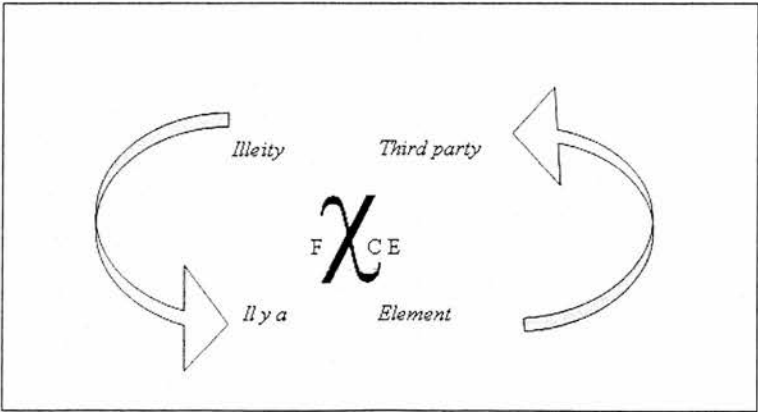
Has it not been hitherto intimated, however, that the element is but one of four transversals that decussate the face and in whose trace(s) the ‘Other’ stands? With Jean Wahl, the dedicatee of *Totality and Infinity*, might we not concur that:

There is a meaning [*sens*] of the low that develops *at the same time* as the meaning of the high (Wahl, 1948, 250).

The simultaneity adumbrated by Wahl here (central to the latter’s understanding of transcendence as at once a movement of trans-ascendence and trans-descendence (JW 81)) clearly informs Levinas’ account of diachrony and instructs his presentation of ilyaity and illeity. While throughout his work Levinas will endeavour, as he puts it, to ‘remain attentive to the meaning of the divine that shines forth *at the moment* when the second term [trans-ascendence] of Wahl’s alternative is true’ (JW 81; translation altered), *might one not reduce this moment further*, beyond the reason that posits itself as diachrony, and complicate the susception in which Levinas deduces ‘the ultimate figure of the meaningful [*l’ultime figure du sens*]’ (CW 165; CV56)?

If Levinas’ project does not move in the direction of being or non-being but ‘toward an excluded middle’ (JL 87), if it takes its bearing, qua work, from the (non)site of this alternance of terms (and it is as such that it is sceptical), might the *déstructure* of diachrony not be reduced to what we have had occasion to call the *chiachrony* that subtends it, since the decussation of transversals that intersect the face (element, *il y a*, illeity, third party) arguably form a chiasm at their point of confluence? We may represent this quadripartite, chiachronic structure thus, a figure that might be termed the ethical circumstances of the face:

The ethical circumstances of the face



The structure, or rather *déstructure*, outlined here is, I would contend, ‘the binding place [*point de nouement*]’ (OBBE 12; AE 27) of and for signification, the ‘ethical circumstances’ (MM 94) of the face, its place of issuance and generation. The four transversals decussate one another and the face is ‘produced,’ qua face, at their point of decussation, which remains, apropos of Levinas, ‘the point of a possible confusion’ (GP 141). To limit the signification of the face, to delimit its provocation, or to restrict its appeal to the human being alone, is to disrupt the circumincession of transversals and disturb their injunctive sway. The four transversals hold sway *in, at,* and *through* the face. The face is heritable since the configuration of the face to which one responds is bestowed generatively. The schema of the face to which one submits, the figure of the face to which one is susceptible, is won through acquisition and confirmed as normative through frequentation. The face retains its wonder (*étonnement*), therefore, and retains its place as that which orients sense (*sens*), because the circumstances of its provocation, the *espacement* of its appeal, repeatedly expose thought to the situation of its birth, the an-archaic space of its delivery, that place from which thought is called forth and summoned to account. Philosophy begins and ends in wonder (θαυμάζειν), then, since it is in and as wonder that this space of provocation opens. The limits of provocation are the limits of attestation, limits I have sought to delimitate throughout this study of Levinas.

I bring to my reading of Levinas, then, a version of the question he himself posed in 1974 when, in the essay ‘De la conscience à la veille. A Partir de Husserl,’ he asks ‘is the *liveliness* of life not excession – a *rupture* of the container by the noncontainable that precisely *thus* animates or inspires?’ (CW 166). This question, no doubt inspired in me by Levinas (in accordance with the logic of heritability I have assayed above) and marked by the latter’s thought, a question that precedes me and the time of *this* research, relates also to a certain disquietude, to disquiet I have felt so often when reading and rereading Levinas, disquietude I have attempted to explain and defend in this work: Why, finally, if the space of ethics is anarchic, as Levinas purports, is the presentation of the face governed by regulative principles (ἀρχαί) and organized by procedures of legitimation and description (νόμοι) that determine what may or may not signify *as* a face? More finely put: If susception is, as Levinas adverts, a ‘passivity still more passive than the receptivity that assumes what affects it,’ if, furthermore, the ‘ethical moment is not founded on any preliminary structure of theoretical thought [*le moment éthique ne vient se fonder sur aucune structure préliminaire de pensée théorique*]’ (GP 148; DVI 126), but is founded rather in the idea of infinity (TI 26), why are limits imposed *a priori* upon alterity and its

imperative force constrained by directives that precede the instance of its provocation?

My reading of Levinas turns, therefore, on the issue of susceptibility (*la susceptibilité*), upon its *staging* and *regulation*. I have subjected Levinas' account of the 'straightforwardness' (*la droiture*) of sense to critique and contested his claim that the 'signifyingness' (*la signifiante*) of the face is 'independent' of all 'meaning received from the world [*signification reçue du monde*],' 'outside of every order [*extérieure à tout ordre*]' (MS 53; SS 51-52), and "'prior to" history and culture [*<avant> l'histoire et <avant> la culture*]' (MS 58; SS 60). While I believe Levinas to be correct in his assertion that the face *disturbs* the predelineated structures of experience and challenges the autarky of the ego, the suggestion that the face undoes thematization *absolutely*, eluding, as Levinas avers, 'principle, origin, and will' (S 81), cannot be so readily sustained and ultimately lacks cogency. The *figure* of the face to which Levinas appeals throughout his many opera and opuscula is one which, precisely as 'face' (*visage*), has been subdued by its representation within that work and compelled to accept the limits against which it is set forth there. Yet, by drawing the face back into the dimension of its historicity and charting its emergence qua face, that is, by recounting its legacy, I have tried to formalize the conditions under which that which faces does so within the work of Levinas and to exhibit the provenance and range of its signification. By returning Levinas' presentation of the face to the horizons of its constitution (to be sure, a move that is at once phenomenological and hermeneutical), I have shown that the 'upsurge' of the face admits of preparatory phases. The passage (πόρος) from interiority to metaphysical exteriority involves a rite of passage, a graduated education: susception to and for the face is pedagogically primed and liturgically staged.

My engagement with Levinas has been informed throughout by a series of interpretative principles (or principles of reading) that have facilitated my treatment of his work. I have sought, wherever possible, to be rigorous in my application of these principles, without, of course, forcing Levinas to be complicit in his own *Destruktion*, or to endorse ideas that are foreign to his thought, while recognizing that a certain violence is unavoidable in this regard. The principles to which I have had recourse may be enumerated as follows and constitute collectively what I would call my hermeneutical strategy:

1. To conduct a phenomenologico-hermeneutical excavation (*fouille*) of the field of inquiry (the space, spacing and *espacement* of ethics) and to probe, mine,

tend and attend to its basic terms through the systematic interrogation of those regulative concepts, ideas and modes of authorization upon which the elaboration of that 'space' depends: the set of genera necessary for its accomplishment (*accomplissement*).

2. To work loose or disengage tacitly deposited suppositions from the situation of their positing and to determine the 'ancestry' of such posita in order to underscore that which is peremptory, dogmatic or taken as self-evident within Levinasian thought and to unravel its 'heritage' accordingly.
3. To bring to light interruptions (fissures, lacunae, aporias) in the internal coherence of Levinas' thought and to situate those lapses or *slippages* in relation to the order they disturb; to mark and demarcate these sites of tension within Levinas' work and to account for their incidence.

Through the application of these principles I have advanced a series of arguments against Levinas designed to *unsettle* the stability of his project and complicate the legitimacy of its itinerary.

The foregoing investigation has shown that Levinas' work is pervaded by positings that cannot be justified within the context of his 'radical empiricism [*l'empirisme radical*]' (TI 196; TEI 213) and that must be *set back* within the perspective from which they were first constituted and brought forth. The ways in which the face is revealed (or reveals itself καθ' αὐτό) are part of the meaning (*sens*) of the 'face' posited by Levinas. In so far as I have tried to recover these access routes to the face and question the privilege conferred upon them by Levinas, my analysis may be said to be both restitutive and critical. I have shown that a complex ideational montage undergirds the thought of Levinas and shapes his 'eschatological vision [*la vision eschatologique*]' (TI 25; TEI 10). By exposing this nexus of signification to scrutiny, I have, I believe, proved that the ethical *mise-en-scène* exceeds the dimensions of the 'space' within which Levinas situates the work of ethics. My primary aim, therefore, has been to sketch out, behind the Levinasian account of the *face-à-face*, the outlines of *another* space, a space more accommodating of difference in its variegated forms. I have thus sought to include within the sodality of the face-to-face relation those extruded by the terms of Levinas' thought.

Arguably, the slippages to be found throughout Levinas' work, the slippages I have been at pains to highlight throughout this thesis, *repeat*, in the figure of a doubling, the vulnerability (*la vulnérabilité*) that is the subject matter of Levinas' later writings. Levinas' texts, like the susceptibility of the subject (*le sujet*) they treat, must



be turned again and again toward the 'face,' toward that outside (*au dehors*) from which they derive their sense and to which they witness. The slippages I have accented accomplish this movement concretely because they disrupt the order of the work at that moment when the transcendence it supports and bears as its theme is threatened by the terms of its enunciation. By identifying these slippages and documenting their occurrence, I have attempted to deliver the 'face' Levinas details from the 'form' of its assembly in his work, and to broaden the determination of ethics he promotes. The 'torsion' to which I refer in the title of my thesis affirms this objective by capturing the sense of tension that obtains between the transcendence of the face and its philosophical *reduction*, or, as Levinas expresses it, between 'the said [*le Dit*] in which everything is thematized' and 'its signification as saying [*Dire*]' (*OBBE* 183; *AE* 280). This tension *recurs* throughout Levinas' work and manifests itself, as I have demonstrated, in various ways, from the fraught relationship, the *difficile liberté*, between Levinas' Mitnagdism and its philosophical articulation (the conflux of 'Greek' and 'Hebraic' thought), to the 'separation' (*séparation*) between the face and the material format that harbours it, yet with which it is ultimately disunited.

Related to this 'torsion' is the notion of 'temulence' or intoxication (*ivresse*), to which I also refer in the title of my thesis. The latter deliberately plays upon the sense of 'sobering up' (*dégrisement*) Levinas deploys to characterize the subject's exposure to the Other 'in the guise of wound and vulnerability [*en guise de blessure ou vulnérabilité*]' (*CW* 167; *DVI* 59). I have employed the term 'temulence' partly to offset this sense (and therefore as a counterpoint), and partly to emphasize Levinas' willingness to disclaim as 'pagan,' or 'primitive,' modes of thought that resist the logic of his own attestation. Levinas' enthusiasm (*enthousiasme*) for the enterprise of demythologization, and for the extirpation, eradication and expurgation with which he associates this enterprise, itself borders on intoxication. I have attempted to *check* this enthusiasm and question its motivation, in the manner, perhaps, that one *checks* a haemorrhage by applying a torsion.

That this study should have its limitations and that its course should be checked is, of course, inevitable. Many questions have been mooted to which I have been unable to attend in sufficient depth. Areas for future research naturally suggest themselves. Of these, I believe the phenomena of study, rite and lore warrant further consideration. This catena of terms has been exhibited within the work of Levinas and its structure brought to light. It has been argued that what Levinas calls the face, is cleared for signification upon the basis of this structuration of terms. Reflection might

be brought to bear upon these phenomena in order to evaluate their influence upon the development of ethical sense (*sens*). The development or maturation of sense nominated in this study under the heading of 'adolescence,' and treated here only provisionally, likewise merits further examination. If sense undergoes a process of maturation, what regulates its development and manages its transitional phases? Is there a point at which the face first 'breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it' (TI 198) to reveal itself as a face? Might this climacteric phase be appraised phenomenologically and accounted for pedagogically? If it is in and as wonder that the space of ethics opens, can wonder be taught?

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